

Her-Stories of Transformation, Justice, and Peace

Report on the Women of Faith Pilgrimages



**World Council
of Churches**

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Presentation of the Document to the WCC Governing Bodies

The Women of Faith Pilgrim Team Visits for Justice and Peace were carried out between August 2017 and July 2020:

- Nigeria (August 2017)
- Burundi (November 2017)
- South Sudan (May 2018)
- the Democratic Republic of Congo (August 2018)
- South Korea (July 2020)

Another occurred virtually in North America in March 2022. Furthermore, two workshops were held in 2020 to gather the findings of the Women's Pilgrim Team Visits to African countries, providing the national councils of churches of Burundi and South Sudan and their church women with an additional chance to reflect on and speak up about the issues a few years after the first visit of the women's pilgrim teams to their respective countries.

This report is presented to the Staff Leadership Group for consideration and approval for inclusion in the final report of the Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace to the 11th Assembly of the World Council of Churches.

Preamble: Overall Aim of the Women's Pilgrim Team Visits

The overall aim of the Pilgrim Team Visits (PTVs) was to acknowledge and enhance women's role in church and society, gender justice, and peace, with no violence against women. by raising awareness and calling churches as well as ecumenical partners to act together for justice and peace.

Objectives of the Women's Pilgrim Team Visits

The objectives of the Women's PTVs were set specifically, according to individual situations and as shaped by the respective national councils of churches (NCCs). However, they all had a general frame of objectives which could be defined as follows:

- to express solidarity with and accompaniment of our sisters and brothers in violence-prone countries by interacting with women, religious and political leaders, and youth
- to visit the wounds by listening to the stories of gender injustice and violence against women
- to affirm and accompany each other toward healing and transformation
- to strengthen the work of supporting those who are engaged in seeking peace and creating conditions conducive to the transformation of violent conflicts
- to celebrate women's spirituality and gifts, their life-giving, their hope and dignity-enhancing leadership, and their particular capabilities of effective negotiation and peace-building

This document thus seeks to propose the way forward for programmatic activity in relation to the intersectionality of the Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace and the Just Community of Women and Men in the period following the World Council of Churches (WCC) 11th Assembly in Karlsruhe in 2022.

The following recommendations are offered for practical and affirmative responses to the findings of the pilgrims.

Heal Traumas

In cooperation with Regional Ecumenical Organizations (REOs), heal traumas by:

- establishing a program on trauma healing (individual and collective) that encourages, guides, and supports churches in war and post-war contexts to address trauma—especially against women—to capacitate women and their organizations, church leaders, pastors, and peace workers, and social workers of churches to process and transform their own traumas and become healers of individual traumas, to help reconcile and reunite families and communities, support national and local truth and reconciliation initiatives, and so on: the programme should be contextualized and implemented by NCCs.

Combat Violence against Women

Combat violence against women by:

- starting—in cooperation with REOs—an ecumenical initiative to rule out and combat sexual and gender-based violence using Ecumenical HIV and AIDS Initiatives and Advocacy (EHAIA) as a model. Such an initiative could include, among others, peer exchange between church leaders on theology, on best practices, etc., addressing systems

and structures of sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) in society and churches, supporting marriages and youth to overcome harmful role- and marriage models, etc.

- promoting and developing the Thursday in Black (TiB) campaign further as a platform of sharing and a source of materials, tools, toolboxes, initiatives, and theological reflections helpful for the campaigning of churches and women to end violence against women

Strengthen the Capacity of Women in the Ecumenical Family

Strengthen the capacity of women in the ecumenical family by:

- focusing its scholarship programmes on capacity building for women as actors for peace and encouraging the entire ecumenical family to do likewise with their scholarship programmes
- identifying and promoting collective learning opportunities in war or crisis-prone regions and post-conflict regions for women as mediators and as peace activists running peace campaigns, participating in peace missions, healing and reconciling post-war communities etc.—together with REOs, subregional ecumenical organizations such as the Fellowship of Christian Councils and Churches in the Great Lakes and Horn of Africa (FECCLAHA) and Federation of Councils of Churches in West Africa (FECIWA), NCCs, and specialized ministries
- setting up a mentoring programme between senior ecumenical female leaders and young/upcoming female ecumenical leaders and facilitating their networking

Background

The 10th Assembly of the World Council of Churches (WCC), held in Busan, South Korea in 2013, invited churches, people of faith, and men and women of goodwill to join the Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace (PJP) through praying, working, and walking together for justice and peace in the world. A number of focus countries were selected for ecumenical Pilgrim Team Visits (PTVs), which included the Democratic Republic of Congo, South Sudan, Burundi, Nigeria, and Palestine. Building equitable communities of women and men became a priority for the WCC as it set out on the Pilgrimage in response to the call from its 10th Assembly in 2013. In the programme report, the 10th Assembly acknowledged that divisive issues such as gender had a place within the WCC since it functioned as “a safe space to enter into dialogue and moral discernment on matters which the churches find challenging.” This is a cross-cutting approach in all WCC programmes, promoting the establishment of a culture of justice and peace with neither violence nor discrimination against women in the church or in society.

As the pilgrimage gained momentum, collective wisdom within the leadership of both the PJP and the WCC recognized the need to organize specific PTVs to women in some of the focus countries. This seemed helpful in countries where an entrenched social code within society and the church discriminates against women, with the effect of injustice and violence against women appearing to be normal rather than a denial of their God-given dignity. Women would also not be recognized and included in peace efforts as relevant players in the context of conflict prevention, non-violent conflict transformation, and reconciliation, nor would they be invited to speak up and share their stories and (theological) reflections.

Walking Her-Stories

Consequently, a series of PTVs in several African pilgrimage focus countries as well as South Korea was organized by the WCC and/or members of the PJP Reference Group, always in cooperation with the respective NCCs. They were seen as complementing the ongoing PTVs of the PJP Reference Group. Members of the visiting as well as the hosting teams were mainly but not exclusively women. NCC/church leadership was always involved and accompanied the teams during their visits as well as during their prayers and reflections.

Some church leaders only recognized afterwards that they had not been aware of the realities and massive scale of women’s suffering and struggle in conflict and war situations; some members within the women’s PTVs even felt like they were “visiting a foreign country,” as one of them said. As a result, in addition to the special women’s PTVs, all remaining PTVs (to Palestine, Colombia, Asia, and Fiji) that were organized by the WCC PJP Reference Group particularly focused on injustice and violence against women and girls and asked the NCCs to organize the PTVs accordingly. The PJP Theological Study Group took up these issues as well.

Rationale

The pilgrims and hosts of the Women of Faith Pilgrim Team Visits and of the PJP Reference Group's pilgrim visits recognize that women have countless stories to share of specific pain and victories, of faith and resilience amid cruelty. Pilgrims on the journey of justice and peace lament the absence of recognition of women's potential to assume leadership roles in times of conflict: for their suffering and sacrifices; their resilience and capacity to lead and heal their families and communities; and their capacity for peacebuilding and reconciliation. They long for gender justice because women are so often ignored, silenced, demoralized, marginalized, violated, and oppressed in their families, communities, and even the ecumenical family. By including the experiences and voices of women, churches and the ecumenical family could and should deepen and broaden their analysis of systemic violence and injustice against women and witness the life-affirming gospel more truly.

This pilgrimage report allows church women worldwide to draw inspiration and strength from the spiritualities of resistance, biblical reflections, and successful struggles of women against violence and injustice and to feel empowered to become agents of transformation and hope in their own contexts.

Learnings and Celebrations

Visiting the Wounds (*via negativa*)

Violence against Women

“Women are owned but do not own anything.” (Burundian idiom)

Pilgrims observed that in most of the countries they visited, women’s non-participation in socio-political activities and decisions, their lack of rights, and the systematic social and economic deprivation is comprehensive and tangible. This was evident even among the churches, which tended to follow the social code of their culture. Women are denied access to resources, opportunities, and, in some cases, social services, such as education or health care. They are rendered invisible, and their voices are unheard, as they are considered persons with limited or no value. The Nigerian visit confirmed that militias like Boko Haram, with its particular approach of cruelty and inhumanity against women, have followed and reinforced these codes.

Pilgrims were shocked to learn that in the African countries they visited, anyone could do anything to girls and women—particularly to those living with disabilities. Women with disabilities shared heartrending stories about their disproportionate marginalization, exclusion, and pain during violent conflict with the pilgrims. Suffering from double discrimination, women living with disabilities spoke of how, regardless of their high vulnerability, their individual and collective risks and their need for support and protection are totally ignored by those who are mandated to accompany them.

This horrific truth is cloaked in a culture of silence and is tacitly promoted by a culture of impunity around violence against women. Because women’s lives simply don’t matter in day-to-day life, they are used as battlefields (rape) or weapons (suicide bombers). Their bodies, souls, and futures can be damaged and destroyed without society or the church acknowledging or taking action toward protecting, rescuing, and healing them—for they are seen as “just women,” “just girls.” Generally, churches and society have consistently failed to recognize the potential and gifts women may offer in peacebuilding processes.

In all conflict contexts visited, pilgrims learned that sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) is prevalent, widespread, and systematically used as a weapon of war and as a tool of intimidation. The pilgrims heard innumerable stories of various forms of SGBV against female villagers and internally displaced people (IDPs). The cruelty and multitude of violent experiences leave a trail of pain and untold trauma on the women and girls, which is particularly problematic for women living with disabilities. The much-needed gender-specific protection and intentional support of women in conflict zones and for humanitarian assistance for female IDPs, especially for those with disabilities, was exposed. It was evident that providing opportunities to rebuild the lives of women and girls who have experienced abuse and violation is as critical as creating safe harbours for counselling, healing, and training.

The culture of violence is strongly reinforced as a by-product of war and militarization. For women, as long as rape is used as a weapon of armed conflict, their bodies remain battlefields—even in their own homes and communities. Domestic violence increases not only during but also following periods of conflict and war, possibly due to men’s frustration at no longer being able to perform their traditional societal role as protectors. Violence against women is normalized. The

reality of the complexities of male versus female power relations in culture, religion, and society at large translates into different expressions of gender injustice.

Pilgrims saw a close link between gender and peace work. Successful peace processes anchored in addressing gender injustices are key among other factors. South Korean women shared their view that gender injustice and patriarchy are side effects of or, rather, elements of ongoing militarization and that “for Korean women, it is not only a desire for a peace treaty, but also an end to patriarchy.”

Where women are perceived as no different from animals, violence is always around the corner. It starts with wrongful stereotypes about women and men and their roles, and it continues with subsequent discrimination fostered by the culture. Some churches’ teachings and behaviours further promote and perpetuate harmful cultural stereotypes rather than taking a gospel standpoint to criticize those life- and dignity-denying cultural practices within their contexts.

Most church leaders and congregational boards have ignored or downplayed women’s and girls’ suffering during previous violent conflicts, opting to ignore their stories of pain and neglecting to provide support, protection, safe spaces, or trauma healing for female IDPs or for the girls kidnapped by Boko Haram. That role has widely been left for facilitation by church women’s organizations.

Participants felt that it is time for the church to interrogate theologies that stereotype women, to end complicity with violence against women and children, and to advocate for the church sanctuary to be a safe space for victims of SGBV. Church leadership should be encouraged to constitute and institutionalize accountability mechanisms within the church. Putting one’s own house in order is a prerequisite for effective advocacy against and the curbing of SGBV.

Trauma

Trauma that is not addressed and transformed is transferred to the next generation, keeps the conflict cycle going, and is a huge hindrance to development.

Trauma, resulting from violent conflicts, war, and SGBV, is real and cannot be denied. The leadership of churches, communities, and governments that are confronted daily with this issue must not ignore it. Providing spaces for women affected by trauma and SGBV to speak up and giving opportunities for full participation for all women—including those in leadership—would help churches to better understand the pain experienced by women and to serve their needs more effectively. It would also help in embracing women’s gifts and potential, especially in peace work and missions.

Pilgrims learned from affected women that churches are well suited and well situated for a faith-based trauma response; they are sometimes the only institutions that are strategically positioned to restore dignity, self-esteem, self-image, and hope. In discussions with pilgrims, church leaders showed strong interest in assisting in trauma transformation; however, they lacked the knowledge, resources, and ability to address such needs effectively. Furthermore, pastors and church leaders often need counselling for and transformation of their own traumas before they can help process the trauma of others and heal their communities.

The global ecumenical family needs to intentionally increase efforts to encourage, empower, and resource national councils of churches and their member churches. They should include their women’s organizations in those areas both during and following wars and violent conflicts as well as in negotiating peace accords in Africa and other places. Pilgrims understood that a coordinated

WCC initiative is needed to foster capacity building, sharing of materials and programs, and managing of resources shared by the ecumenical family to help churches and women in conflict and post-conflict countries assume a critical role in healing individuals and societies to promote and affect peace.

Women as Peacemakers and Healers (via positiva)

Pilgrims learned that women mediators—if they are encouraged and included to act as such—can be and are very effective, not only but especially at grassroots levels and among broken communities. Women are a major force in building resilience against incitement to and manipulation of violence and reducing hostility by providing information, education, and services for people from a diverse range of regions, which opens up more opportunities to bring people from different walks of life together in dialogue.

Pilgrims understood that more women mediators, as well as leaders of religious women's organizations, need to be trained and resourced as peacemakers and healers since they have so far generally carried the burden of trauma healing of individuals and communities. This requires resources from the ecumenical family and supportive programs from the WCC, and it should start with young women with leadership potential. Pilgrims discussed how to empower young women in the ecumenical family for future leadership roles in their societies and churches—especially in times of conflict—and to secure spaces in the ecumenical family for articulating women's contribution in the future. Special capacity building and mentoring programs for young Christian women from within the ecumenical family should be set up and facilitated by senior female leaders in the ecumenical family.

Pilgrims rejoiced with South Sudanese women over their successful fasting and praying campaign. Together with women of other churches and faiths, they mobilized masses of people to rally for peace. The church women's campaign opened additional opportunities for their churches to get involved in the political peace process in South Sudan. Pilgrims were also glad to hear that the success of the Tamar campaign and other initiatives of the National Council of Churches of Burundi (CNEB) and its Bible Society to address the traumas of women is uncovering opportunities to play a greater role in addressing trauma and SGBV in the wider society of Burundi. Providing funds from the ecumenical family would allow these opportunities to be realized. The support of the ecumenical family could help churches in war and post-war contexts to use such privileges and make significant strides toward paving the way for peacebuilding in their nations.

Women in South Korea and Nigeria have demonstrated the importance of recording untold stories of trauma and violence, documenting the widely ignored and forgotten suffering of female victims, and campaigning for the payment of reparations to the victims. They have also shown the value of continuous advocacy for the recognition of sexual violence as a means of war and of the use of military sexual slavery systems to be considered a war crime. Pilgrims admired efforts to help restore the dignity of victimized women and process their traumas—sometimes the only source of hope for the women suffering.

Women in South Korea, Colombia, and African countries are seeking recognition in the form of their own seat at the table when it comes to decision making within the church and the wider community in the context of key national processes such as national reconciliation and constitutional reviews.

Transformation (via transformativa)

Pilgrims were moved and amazed by the resilience, perseverance, innovation, and political acumen of Christian women as well as their capacity to mobilize large numbers of people toward collective collaboration on peacebuilding.

Pilgrims were impressed to see that many victims had “found ways to resurrect life from death”—partly thanks to church women’s efforts to restore dignity; to offer wholeness, healing, and hope; and to rebuild the lives of persons impacted by SGBV during and after wars and conflicts.

From their dialogues with women in conflict situations, pilgrims found that faith is the main source of hope, strength, and power in the midst of conflict. Bible reading and prayers are strong sources of persistence and perseverance. Prayer is a very strong power on individual and collective levels that is often underestimated by the powers that be. Listening to horrifying stories of pain, pilgrims themselves sometimes found that joint prayer and sharing of bible reflections was their only solace.

There is no evidence in the Bible that God gave women less dignity and value than men, that they were not created in God’s image, or that God did not care for justice and rights for poor, marginalized women. The opposite remains true. Pilgrims found that the Bible—and faith-based on scripture reading, prayer, and singing—is the strongest, and sometimes the only, source of hope and resilience for women with multiple experiences of discrimination, denial of human rights, and devaluation in society or their own churches.

Moreover, they heard numerous stories of how the Bible encouraged and taught women the wisdom and skills to take on (unauthorized) leadership and peacebuilding roles and to contribute significantly to peace, reconciliation, and even the continuation and liberation of their people or community—as did so many biblical women in the midst of patriarchal systems. This was evident in the Democratic Republic of Congo, especially as the Church of Christ in Congo (ECC) women joined forces to adopt a home for abandoned children, providing food, clothing, and other supplies in addition to making visits to demonstrate support and solidarity for children and staff at Mama Koko’s home.

Like women in the Bible who also are sometimes nameless and unrecognized by the religious and political leaders and who act without the mandate of any formal authority, women today can transform a hopeless and desperate situation into one of inspiring hope. This strengthens not only the women but also the youth and the entire communities in situations of fear and despair. Where women gathered, they sang: songs of hope, faith, and encouragement—to themselves, to youth, and to the opposition—underscored by scripture and theological reflection in small or large groups.

Pilgrims also reflected on their experiences, documented as pilgrim prayers, offering an opportunity to process their experiences of trauma, resilience, and transformation shared in the encounters and stories of women. Presented as a combination of biblical extracts which provide the base for brief reflection and contextualized prayers, these theological reflections have been made accessible to the entire ecumenical family through Thursdays in Black (TiB) posts on social media. It is vital that they be further developed and continue to be used as a tool for reflection, transformation, and engagement.

The Women of Faith PTVs have demonstrated the power of breaking the silence and opening eyes, ears, and hearts to oppressed and hidden voices of pain which may transform our perceptions of people, of reality and truth, of ourselves and our service. Church leaders in various countries

have testified to such transformation and have affirmed the need for, and their preparedness to walk in solidarity with traumatized women and to publicly elevate the issues of SGBV and of trauma.

There is need to especially acknowledge the then-general secretary of the Christian Council of Nigeria (CCN), who strongly supported the effort to organize the first Women's PTV, which facilitated exposure to the reality of Nigerian women, as this was not accomplished during the original and more general PTV. Special recognition is given also to the then newly elected general secretary of the Lutheran World Foundation (LWF), who took his learnings from the Nigerian Women's PTV with him to the LWF and subsequently encouraged further work on these issues. Such transforming experiences were also encouraged and fostered by several ecumenical visits and interventions on issues of SGBV and trauma within the region and from the WCC, showing that these can be tools for collective transformation.

Pilgrims were encouraged by church initiatives that created spaces for conversation on issues around SGBV in the churches; offered education and counselling for marriages and families on true partnership; addressed false and toxic understandings of masculinity and femininity with youth, and publicly challenged stereotypes and harmful socialization structures that encourage men to exercise violence in families. Some of these were shared in the Pacific Council of Churches PJP team visit, the double pilgrimage to the Republic of South Africa, and the CNEB, through its "Side by Side" initiative. These initiatives demonstrate that churches can play a role as change agents in combating SGBV.

If this work is supported by peer-learning opportunities for church and church council leaders through joint reflection on biblical images of women and men and through discerning the impact of culture on the gospel, this could have a very positive effect.

Where church leaders made efforts to break the culture of silence, speak about, or shine a spotlight on truths surrounding SGBV, this has already had a positive impact on society and has encouraged new thinking at church and legislative levels. The lessons learned from the WCC's Ecumenical HIV and AIDS Initiatives and Advocacy (EHAIA) program has shown how such effects could be very successful in embracing affected people and breaking the silence around HIV and AIDS in Africa. The WCC should consider a similar ecumenical initiative to rule out and counter SGBV in war and conflict contexts.

Within the global ecumenical family, councils of churches must take strategic responsibility for mobilizing, coordinating, and addressing trauma transformation while combating domestic violence as well as violence against women in situations of war. This should be supported or coordinated by the WCC through the sharing of resources, materials, and specific programmes to engage member churches and regions in the post-assembly period.

APPENDICES

Appendix 1: Summary of Reports from Women’s Pilgrim Team Visits

Walking Her-Stories—Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace to Nigeria (6-14 August 2017)

Introduction

A second Pilgrim Team Visit (PTV) to northeast Nigeria with a specific focus on gender justice was initiated by two members of the Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace (PJP), invited by the Christian Council of Nigeria (CCN) and facilitated by Bread for the World and Transforming, Analyzing, Accompanying and Building Change Organizations (TAABCO). Pilgrims came from Kenya, Liberia, Georgia, South Sudan, Germany, the CCN and the Lutheran Church of Christ in Nigeria (LCCN), the World Council of Churches (WCC), and the Ecumenical Disability Advocacy Network (EDAN).

Background

The northern region of Nigeria has a long history of violent attacks starting in the 1970s. From the 1980s to today, the violent conflicts between Christian settlers and Muslim herdsmen (Fulani) in the north (Kaduna and Plateau State) and the atrocities committed by Boko Haram in the northeast (Borno, Adawama State, Jol) have had religious undertones. They are, however, mainly affected by predisposing factors such as corruption, abuse of political and traditional powers, and economic deprivation and imbalances. Nonetheless, there are many places where Christians and Muslims—having coexisted for a long time—continue to build communities together. Violent conflicts between herdsmen and settlers in the north caused much trauma and considerable poverty among the population.

The violence and inhumanity, particularly against women and girls, have reached unknown dimensions with Boko Haram since 2009. Their atrocities committed in the northeast devastated millions of people and destroyed many young lives. Villages were burned down, thousands of girls were captured, and boys and young men were forcefully recruited as fighters. Although the government of Nigeria has achieved some success in dislodging Boko Haram terrorists from their hideout, targeted attacks and kidnapping continue, and Boko Haram has increasingly become a major challenge to Nigerian development. The conflicts in the north and the northeast resulted in 2.4 million internally displaced people (IDPs)—mainly women and children—with tremendous negative humanitarian consequences. Most are being hosted by guest families, while others are living in the streets or in informal IDP settlements, since only a very few official IDP camps exist.

Programme and Activities

In Abuja, the pilgrims worshipped and met with representatives of the Ekklesiyar Yan’uwa a Nigeria/Church of the Brethren in Nigeria (EYN), the Roman Catholic cardinal, the executive secretary of the Abuja National Mosque management, the national president of the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN), the country representative of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), and the project manager of UN Women.

In Plateau State (Eastern Central Nigeria), pilgrims had an interactive town hall meeting in the capital, Jos, with 100 religious leaders, civil society activists, peace practitioners, relevant government departments, and security agencies. They met with the paramount traditional ruler of Jos and the deputy governor of the state; as well, they had dialogues with women in an informal IDP camp in Riyom town (victims of farmers-versus-herders conflicts) and with the leadership

and female victims of Boko Haram insurgency at the Centre for Caring, Empowerment and Peace Initiative (CCEPI) at the outskirts of Jos, founded by Dr Rebecca Dali, theologian of EYN and a UNHCR award winner.

In Adamawa State (north-east), they again had an interactive session in the capital, Yola, with 100 key stakeholders from civil society and government, Muslim and Christian leaders, and women's federations. Pilgrims visited Fufore, one of the biggest governmental IDP camps in north-eastern Nigeria, and later, in contrast, a Roman Catholic Church-run IDP camp, St Teresa. They talked with the bishop and met with the governor of Plateau State. In a most moving meeting organized jointly by the Federation of Muslim Women Association of Nigeria (FOMWAN) and the Women Wing of Christian Association of Nigeria (WOWICAN), pilgrims met with 20 women from Women Affected by Violent Extremism (WAVE) and listened for hours to the most horrendous stories.

In the city of Numan, pilgrims met and discussed with the Lutheran archbishop, newly elected as president of the LWF, other Lutheran bishops, women leaders, and members of the LCCN board. They met with the traditional ruler of the Numan Kingdom. On Sunday, pilgrims worshipped at the cathedral of the LCCN. At the end, two local pilgrims shared their experiences, wounds, and gifts: one woman lives with disability, is a former IDP, and is now church staff; the other works with the Women Wing of the Christian Council of Nigeria (WOWICCN). The only male pilgrim, a Roman Catholic bishop from South Sudan, also shared his experience with violence and trauma in his country.

Stories of Women's Suffering

Pilgrims were told that, although widows of soldiers are officially entitled to regular pension payments or compensation from the government, many women are denied these benefits. They are being disowned of their homes and land by their families to the advantage of the husband's family members. Since there are almost no protection measures, no safe spaces, or chances to generate income for female IDPs, very young IDP girls are being forced into early marriage by their parents. Trafficking became a severe reality for young women. In the government camp, women were used as labour slaves. Anyone could do anything to IDP girls and women without fear of punitive action.

Boko Haram's heinous acts have dramatically affected several thousands of women and girls (their numbers are undocumented). They have been socially displaced, dislocated, humiliated, maimed and incapacitated, violated, raped, and violently abused, causing the deepest traumas. Most of the recent suicide bombers from Boko Haram were girls between the ages of 10 and 14. The majority remain in Boko Haram custody; the government is not interested in liberating them, as they are "just girls." Those who could escape from Boko Haram with their children, conceived and born in captivity under Boko Haram, are stigmatized, rejected by husbands, families, villagers, and pastors, forcefully expelled from their communities and even their congregations. Thus, they have become even more vulnerable and traumatized. Since no one wants to host them, they have no place to stay and no one to take care of them, no rights, no access to social services or income. They are extremely poor and severely starved. Out of total despair and lack of a future, some go back to Boko Haram for a living and a sense of belonging.

Living in the streets, as many female IDPs do, they are constantly exposed to the dangers of sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV). They are not even safe in IDP camps and in the presence of

governmental security forces. Such cases would not be followed up, because they are seen as normal. There are almost no places for women, including Boko Haram girls, to get their wounded bodies and souls healed. Some, carrying children from Boko Haram soldiers, hope that those children will later take up arms and kill their fathers. Unhealed traumas are passed on to the next generation and force societies into endless conflicts.

Domestic violence increases in times of conflict since men, feeling frustrated and disempowered to fulfil their role as protectors and providers, try to regain power and control over their life by exercising violence against their wives and children. Physically and mentally disabled people have additional difficulties when it comes to receiving adequate support—particularly women and children. No provisions are made for them to access deliveries and services in camps.

Pilgrims experienced the conspicuous hierarchical structure of the Nigerian society, at least in the regions they visited. Cultural traditions in the north regard women as the weakest members of the hierarchy: they are seen as inferior, and their non-participation and lack of rights in society are comprehensive and tangible, even within the churches. They are invisible, and their voices are unheard. Boko Haram, with its particular cruelty and inhumanity against women, has followed and reinforced this code by training boys and men to totally disregard the dignity and the right to life of women—forcing them even to kill or rape their own mothers and sisters.

Women as Peacemakers and Healers

Both Muslim and Christian women told us about how they are promoting peace as mothers in rejecting prejudices and teaching their children their best religious values. They act as female Good Samaritans, protecting and rescuing women and children from violence across religious boundaries. They are excluded from peace and interreligious negotiations yet are demanding inclusion in peace-making efforts.

Women are active in their congregations or mosques in delivering humanitarian services to IDPs. Beyond that, both women's organizations are active in informing and educating women, particularly girls, and in health services. Moreover, WOMICAN advocates women's concerns and needs to authorities and offers legal advice to women.

The town hall meeting in Yola led to closer cooperation between FOMWAN and WOWICCN (as pilgrims learned later), since Muslim and Christian women leaders, listening to each other during this meeting, understood that they had more in common as women suffering than what divided them by religion.

The Churches' Response

The work of CCN and member churches in the field of interreligious dialogue is impressive. However, they admitted that prior to the women's PTV, most church leaders and congregations were not aware of women's and girls' suffering during the violent conflicts. They had neither listened to their stories nor cared about providing support, protection, safe spaces, or trauma healing for female IDPs or for the Boko Haram girls.

The two interactive sessions—with 100 major stakeholders each, half male, half female, organized by the general secretary of the CCN—were unique: Muslim and Christian stakeholders, for the first time and in public, listening to each other, and men listening to women and discussing issues such as trauma healing, breaking the silence around SGBV, and women's leadership roles and experiences.

Pilgrims observed that the churches are following the social code of inferiority of women. They are not permitted to speak up or even participate in most meetings; they are not represented in the leadership of congregations or churches.

Summary

The PTV documented a very high prevalence of violence of all kinds, including SGBV, against women in homes and society and as a weapon of war in the context of violent conflicts. Violence against women is the norm but remains shrouded in silence. The reality of the complexities of male versus female power relations in culture, religion, and society at large translates into different expressions of gender injustice.

The PTV exposed the need for trauma healing from the impact of gender-based violence in PJP-priority countries. Unhealed trauma continues from one generation to another, yet trauma healing is extremely important for future peace.

Churches need to provide space for women to share their sorrows and suffering. Churches must also offer trauma healing services for those women and help victims of Boko Haram with reconciliation and reintegration into their families and communities.

The highly neglected need for gender-specific protection and explicit support of women in conflict zones and in humanitarian assistance for female IDPs was exposed. Particular attention must be paid to women living with disabilities.

Local senior church leaders were shocked to hear the multitude and details of stories of gender-based violence and trauma that Nigerian women experience; these had not been heard and seen as a challenge and a duty by the churches so far.

Walking Her-Stories—Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace to Burundi (7-12 November 2017)

Introduction

The WCC commissioned a delegation of women pilgrims for justice and peace at the invitation of the Burundi Council of Churches. This is within the spirit and commitment of the 2013 WCC assembly in Busan, where the ecumenical movement decided to deepen its approach of sending living letters for witness and solidarity visits. The WCC supported a delegation of nine members from Ghana, Sierra Leone, Togo, Zimbabwe, Seychelles, Kenya, and Burundi for this visit, which was generously hosted by the Burundi Council of Churches. Over decades, from pre-independence to this day, the people of Burundi have been searching and working toward just peace and healing following many cycles of violence.

Background

The country has witnessed dark days and yet remains resolute in finding solutions. In 2015, the country experienced another political crisis and election violence. The people of Burundi continue in their quest for fully upholding the commitments of the Arusha Accords as well as the Burundian Constitution. The church in Burundi and its global leadership are united in their solidarity with the people of Burundi at this moment in time. This solidarity is symbolized by the visits of the general secretary of the WCC, the Archbishop of Canterbury, and the Roman Catholic cardinal of Ethiopia, among many others, during the recent difficult period.

Programme and Activities

During the five-day visit, the delegation met with church leaders, women leaders within the church, laywomen and men, interfaith networks, representatives of political parties and NGOs, ordained women, and young people. The delegation had the opportunity to worship with the various churches in Burundi and visited the people's markets. The delegation also visited various memorial sites and historical places, such as Independence Square and the Unity Monument. The team debriefed with senior church leaders on their experience. The delegation did not, however, have the opportunity to visit rural areas and refugee camps. They observed Thursdays in Black (TiB) with a community of religious sisters and brothers.

The delegation heard the following as the critical priorities for the people of Burundi and especially for women and young people:

- Address the debilitating poverty at the household level to build capacities for families to cater for their needs; enable children and young people to receive quality, relevant education and employment, and rebuild the economy for the daughters and sons of Burundi to rely on and enjoy their country's natural resources and potential.
- Prioritize the laws and practices that address issues of gender-based violence and women's rights regarding access to land and inheritance. Women are seeking recognition and their place at the table of decision making within the church as well as in their communities in the context of key national processes such as reconciliation and constitutional reviews, especially at the community level.
- Limited opportunities are available for women to pursue theological studies. The pilgrims met with a few women theologians and learned from conversation that there are very few ordained women. The church must take special measures and actions to increase the theological training of women.

- It was apparent that the church and the people of Burundi are deeply concerned and are doubling their efforts to confront the issues of teenage pregnancy, child marriage, and human trafficking. Prevention measures must be stepped up as well as those for providing opportunities to rebuild lives for women and girls who have experienced abuse and violation. It is critical to have safe harbours for counselling and training.
- The voice of the young people came out strongly against violence. There is disappointment that they are being used for political gain, often due to poverty. They called for more opportunities in education, particularly for girls, and for the creation of jobs and employment for young men and women. Many young people asked for parents to be more available to their children and to provide appropriate sex and sexuality education.

Walking Her-Stories—Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace to South Sudan (5-9 May 2018)

From 5 to 9 May 2018, a group of pilgrims answered the call by engaging in an ecumenical women-to-women solidarity visit with the subtheme of “African Women of Faith and Gender Justice.” The pilgrimage was organized by WCC and the South Sudan Council of Churches (SSCC). The overall aim of the PTV was to acknowledge and build women’s role in church and society, explore what gender justice would look like in the South Sudanese context, and accompany the efforts for peace with no violence against women by raising awareness and calling churches and ecumenical partners to action together for justice and peace. The delegation to South Sudan particularly affirmed the fact that gender equality is a necessary foundation for a peaceful and sustainable world.

The Pilgrim Team brought together women from Ghana, Tanzania, the USA, and the UK along with staff from the All African Council of Churches (AACC), the World Communion of Reformed Churches (WCRC), and the WCC, with leaders and staff of the SSCC and the Presbyterian Church of South Sudan. The pilgrims listened to women’s stories—from victims of displacement, violence, and oppression—as well as the testimonies of church leaders, women parliamentarians, and youths in an effort to celebrate the gifts, visit the wounds, and identify calls for action.

The wounds and pain of the country’s people, especially of the women of South Sudan, spoke loudly to the delegation, who heard stories of sexual violence, rape, sexual exploitation of children, hunger, poverty, impacts of the economic crisis, the prevalence of weapons, and constant fear and insecurity. “South Sudanese women are carrying a lot,” one woman from South Sudan said. Yet, amid immense suffering, under the shadow of a government that is resistant to properly providing for and working for its people, there is rejoicing, praising of God, and acknowledgement of the gifts and blessings that persist.

Key Themes during the Visit

Sexual and gender-based violence

In South Sudan, sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) is prevalent, widespread, and systematically used as a weapon of war and a tool of intimidation. The pilgrims heard innumerable stories of SGBV of various forms: rape, sexual assault, physical assault, forced marriage, psychological and emotional violence, and intentional denial of access to resources or employment opportunities. Also, the long-term, disastrous effects of conflict-related sexual violence, rooted in constant fear, threats, insecurity, and abuse, is intrinsically linked to the lived reality of women and other vulnerable groups in South Sudan. It must also be acknowledged that those living in Juba experience relative safety compared to other regions outside Central Equatoria and that female refugees are exposed to an even higher risk of being threatened, abused, raped, and forced to marry as girls.

In all meetings, all groups explained how women and young girls were stigmatized in their community. All the effects of war were connected directly to the violation of women’s rights. Women were mentioned as being perceived as animals based on how society treats them. Women are denied resources, opportunities, and social services such as education or health services. Women in South Sudan have no right to receive education; 84 percent of women in South Sudan are illiterate. The ongoing conflict in the country has disrupted daily life, and many South Sudanese are unable to participate in the local economies in meaningful way. South Sudan is one of the poorest countries in the world: “lives here have been diminished to an inhuman level,” one

participant said. Due to poverty, girls at a very young age are forced into marriage to old men who have many wives and leave the responsibility of feeding the children to their wives—this is seen as normal, according to the culture.

The role of faith, the church, and church women

“We have been born in war, grew up in war, married in war and we may die in war—but we still hope that God will turn this situation one day.”

It was emphasized over and over again to the Pilgrim Team that the church is the only place into which people have been able to put their hope. At church, people feel secure; they are healed through the gospel and the time of praise. Many believe that only God will bring peace to their country, where human beings have failed. Whereas the presence of women in governing bodies of churches and SSCC is extremely rare, there are a number of activities for women being driven by congregations, churches, and the council: capacity building for women on good governance, good leadership, business skills, and issues of peacebuilding. Women in their churches do charitable works by providing services to people who are in need, regardless of their political party affiliation. Women also offer Bible studies and meditation and run special programmes on HIV and AIDS for women. Through their services, they can often bring people belonging to different conflict parties together and facilitate real communication.

South Sudanese women were and are important actors in community mobilization for peace. Since 2014, shortly after the crisis erupted, women in the church have organized monthly prayer walks where they engage children, orphans, widows, opposition leaders, church leaders, and others to walk together to the various churches. Every month, they have nearly 500 women and supporters praying in the streets as they walk, encouraging each other to put their hope in God that there will be peace. Each year on 21 September, International Day of Peace, they meet and pray together, and they invite and speak up in the media. They also send messages of peace, hope, and faith to the people every month.

In 2017, South Sudanese church women formed a body called South Sudan Council of Churches’ National Women’s Program to pursue political advocacy. It is comprised of women church leaders, women’s civil societies, and women members of parliament.

Walking Her-Stories—Visit to the Democratic Republic of Congo (18-23 August 2018)

Background

The pilgrims came from Angola, Burundi, Jamaica, Kenya, and Zambia and were joined by the president of the Ecumenical Women's Association in Congo as well as a WCC central committee member from the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) as local pilgrims. Two pilgrims were people living with disabilities (PLWD).

Expected Outcomes

1. Collect stories of women about their understanding and experiences of gender justice and peace in church and society.
2. Reaffirm and further develop the theme of peacebuilding in the context of religion and violence, building upon previous Pilgrim Team Visits to Nigeria, Burundi, and South Sudan.
3. Harvest some examples of women's leadership styles, resilience, and methodology of resistance to gender injustice and violence against women.

Programme and Activities

During the four days of the pilgrimage, the team attended meetings, participated in worship services, and visited sites that spotlight social (and therefore gender) justice issues in the DRC. The entire visit took place in the capital, Kinshasa. From Monday, 20 August, each day started with devotions and ended with a debriefing session, reflection, and prayer. Together with the WCC general secretary and his team, whose visit partly overlapped with the Pilgrim Team Visit (PTV), the pilgrims were welcomed at an ecumenical service at the Church of Christ Cathedral and a reception hosted by the Church of Christ in the DRC. Afterward, both teams visited the Salvation Army, where a special programme was held in their honour. The pilgrims noted the challenges faced by women in the context, as it was increasingly evident that the welcome was extended to the men, particularly the male pastors in the group.

In the days that followed, the pilgrims had the opportunity to join an ecumenical conference of 400 to 450 women from the Protestant Church and shared a picnic with some of them the next day. They visited the Presbyterian Family Centre and the Kimbondo Pediatric Hospital and Orphanage. They also met with the Human Rights Commission, the Ecumenical Youth Association, and Iman'Enda, the organization for pastoral care for PLWD (founded by the late Dr Micheline Kamba Kasongo, a former member of the WCC central committee and one of the local hosts). Finally, they were received by the rector of the Church of Christ of Congo University and the archbishop as well as the bishop of Kinshasa.

Biblical reflections

This PTV, comprised solely of women pastors and female theological professionals, was characterized by the team members' intensive theological reflections. The longer narrative report is therefore complemented by such reflections by individual members (on John 4:1-30, Genesis 38, Matthew 1:3, Luke 10:38-42, John 11:1-45, and Judges 13:1-25). These reflections were based on the pilgrims' contextualized view of the pilgrimage with their own African (and Caribbean) life experiences and, at the same time, what they heard and learned from the women they visited. They found that the Bible—and faith based on scripture reading, praying, and singing—is the strongest, and sometimes the only, source of hope and resilience for women who experience multiple forms

of discrimination, denial of human rights, and devaluation in society and in their own churches. Yet, the women's resilience and strength, as well as the support they offered for their own, was evident in the special efforts in adopting the Kimbondo Orphanage as part of their outreach and in the age-old practice of lament and praise—prayers sent up to heaven.

Despite the despair and the threat of rape and concubinage (in the midst of patriarchal systems), accompaniment and solidarity have the potential to encourage and teach women the wisdom and skills to take on unauthorized leadership and peacebuilding roles. It can also contribute significantly to peace, reconciliation, and even the continuation and liberation of their people or community. Even as women in the Bible are sometimes nameless, are not recognized by the religious and political leaders, and act without the mandate of any formal authority, their actions can nonetheless transform a panicking situation into an inspiring, hope-filled one—a situation where God has an agenda for peace and justice for their nation: the people of Israel and the DRC.

Observations and Recommendations

The Pilgrim Team noted that women were visible in worship services; however, an entrenched social code clearly discriminates against them—starting with seating arrangements, which reflect and enforce a clear code of ranking between men and women. This observation runs through all meetings (not only devotions) and reflects the general social code. It is an expression of the country's culture, not the gospel. In principle, the society is very hierarchical, as seen in the way meetings were structured. Open and interactive dialogue with and among participants was nearly impossible: groups always had one spokesperson.

Little of the preaching the team heard addressed the social-political challenges. Instead, it was general and individualized. The silence of the women in discussing matters related to the rape of women during the civil war era and the abandonment of babies conceived by child soldiers or women, who had no desire to be mothers themselves, invited reflection among the pilgrims on the pervasiveness and systematized nature of patriarchy.

Having two female pastors living with disabilities (one local, one international) on the team meant that the aspirations of disabled women toward the fullness of life and their desire to assert their God-given nature were prominently present. As PLWDs are very visible in this (or any) post-war society, this reflects an ongoing task for careful inclusion, pastoral care, and support—particularly for women who face multiple experiences of discrimination.

The systematic social and economic deprivation of women leads to poverty and social stigma. This very often leaves them—particularly in times of war and as refugees and internally displaced people (IDPs)—with no other option than sex work or unwilling or forced concubinage (especially girls and young women) so they can feed their children or have access to colleges and social services.

The young people raised the threat to human value given the climate of violence the people in the DRC are living through. This leaves the churches with the huge task of denouncing all forms of violence and confronting an inhuman culture with the help of the church's life-affirming gospel.

As hymns constitute such a prominent feature of church women's gatherings—with stories of lament, protest, and hope embedded—they could be more purposefully developed as a source of encouragement, hope, and inspiration by affirming God's presence and purposes for the DRC.

Women are capable of and are very active in upholding and inspiring hope within their communities. Women's groups and associations offer services to the community for trauma

healing and social transformation. They are a strong force. They need recognition of and support for this role.

Walking Her-Stories—Hybrid Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace to South Korea (13-15 July 2020)

Background

The Korean War, which broke out in 1950 and still has not been ended by a peace treaty, killed more than six million people and left more than seven million separated families. The entire Korean peninsula was devastated, countless women were brutally sacrificed in the face of national violence, and numerous human rights abuses took place. The year 2020 marked the 70th anniversary of the Korean War. The North/South Korean separation system has been strengthened, and military confrontation has intensified. In this state of war, Korea underwent a hyper-militarization that placed patriarchal power at the top of society under the pretence of protecting national security.

Military dictatorships then used national security as a pretence to suppress movements for women's rights, human rights, democracy, and peaceful unification. As all Korean males were forced to attend military service and education, military hierarchies based on patriarchy became the regular method of operating throughout society. Having suffered under a system of sexual slavery at the hands of the Japanese military, women also continued to suffer sexual objectification in a planned sex trade across US military bases and "camptowns."

Purpose and Expectations

This Pilgrim Team Visit (PTV) sought to express international solidarity with Korean women by visiting women's organizations that have worked to promote peace and human rights since the outbreak of the Korean War. As face-to-face meetings had become difficult due to the COVID-19 situation, this visit turned into a virtual pilgrimage, with dialogue enacted through online meetings. Expectations for the pilgrimage to South Korea were as follows:

- Identify the reality of the Korean War and the hardships of women, especially those working to address wartime sexual violence and misogyny and to share visions.
- Introduce the activities of Christian women working for the realization of women's human rights, peace, and justice in the face of the divisive system.
- Show and strengthen international solidarity with Korean women who have worked to promote peace and human rights since the Korean War.

Pilgrims and Participants

The pilgrimage included more than 30 women gathering online from Women Cross the DMZ, the Ecumenical Forum on Korea, Ecumenical Women (at the United Nations), Presbyterian Women (from the Presbyterian Church USA), the PJP Reference Group, and other international ecumenical partners. They represented eight nationalities from four continents and five time zones, in addition to the team meeting in person daily in South Korea, which included a Korean member of the WCC executive committee. They were accompanied and hosted by, among others, a South Korean member of the WCC executive committee, the Asia president of WCC, and the chair of the Women's Committee of the National Council of Churches in Korea (NCCCK), helped by the assistant coordinator of the Ecumenical Forum for Korea.

Programme and Activities

Pilgrims had virtual meetings with the Korean Association of Women Theologians (KAWT), the Korea Association of Christian Women Minjung, Korean Church Women United, Korean Women's Society for Christian Service (KWSCS), the National Church Women's Association of the Presbyterian Church in the Republic of Korea (PROK), the Korean YWCA, the Presbyterian Church of Korea (PCK), the Anglican Church of Korea, the NCCK Women's Committee, and Women Making Peace (WMP). Virtual visits included Teokgeori Village Museum, Yangi-gun Detention Centre, Durebang, Sunlight Sisters' Center, My Sisters' Place, and Hyosun Misun Peace Park. On the final day, pilgrims witnessed the 1448th Wednesday Demonstration for Justice for "Comfort Women" (sex slaves of the Japanese military during the war) outside the Japanese embassy.

Women's stories and experiences of women struggling for peace and unification in South Korea

The discussion partners informed pilgrims of their efforts to restore human rights following the Korean War, their opposition to militarism and a prolonged USA military presence, their educational efforts, their campaigning for a peace agreement, disarmament, and reunification, and their efforts for reconciliation.

Korean women told the pilgrims some of the untold stories of trauma and violence. They talked about efforts to record the life stories of "grandmothers" who suffered dehumanizing abuse as sex slaves of soldiers under Japanese occupation and were often shunned and forgotten by society and governments, who left them abandoned. The women continue to ask the Japanese government to list the Japanese military sexual slavery system as a war crime and pay reparations to the victims.

Korean women informed the pilgrims about ongoing prostitution and sex trafficking among women of the "camptowns" (communities which offer local support and sexual services to USA military forces in the country) and how church women seek to restore women's rights and dignity, provide services to them, and strive for gender justice and women's rights as well as for an end to Korea's patriarchal socio-economic structures.

Discussion partners shared their experiences of fighting militarism and promoting denuclearization. The prolonged presence of the USA military in the country reinforces the patriarchal culture and structures with its degradation of women and constitutes a perceived or real threat of a nuclear crisis. With more than ten of the pilgrims living in the United States of America, the hosts expressed hope for transformation through the solidarity and advocacy of Americans to counteract the impact of militarization on women in Korea.

A virtual visit to the demilitarized zone (DMZ) and stories shared about crossing the DMZ offered insights and reflections on the open wound of Korea: family separations, the landmine zones, and the peace movement in Korea. Christian women, as part of Women Making Peace, help with humanitarian support for North Korean women and dialogue between women from both Koreas. The aim is to reduce hostility against North Korea through educational work to dispel anti-Korean sentiments that served as obstacles to peace and reconciliation.

Pilgrims' reactions and recommendations

Pilgrims were moved by the women's resilience, perseverance, innovation, political prowess, and acumen, as well as by the Korean—and especially Christian—women's capacity to mobilize large

swaths of Korean people toward collective collaboration on peace and unification. The pilgrims were impressed to see that many of the victims in the centres visited had “found ways to resurrect life from death”—partly thanks to the church women’s efforts to restore dignity and to offer wholeness, healing, and hope to persons who were negatively impacted by sexual and gender-based violence during and after the war.

Pilgrims grappled with the way in which militarized conflicts affect women disproportionately and concluded that peace-making and solidarity by and with women across the world were critical and significant. They felt that women’s empowerment and advocacy groups should be supported financially, socially, and politically by governments and that there should be special legal and other protections for women and their rights in armed conflicts. Crimes committed against women during armed conflict should be thoroughly investigated and addressed, with acknowledgement and apologies by the perpetrators, and with reparations being crucial.

One pilgrim confessed, “I had previously considered patriarchy a problem. I had never viewed gender hierarchy through the lens of being a sin until now. The sexual abuse of Korean women during the Japanese occupation and subsequent USA military occupation is an example of the worst form of patriarchy. All peoples and nations must repent of the sin of patriarchy and the results of their complicity in it.”

Pilgrims understood that for Korean women, “it is not only a desire for a peace treaty but also an end to patriarchy.” They see gender injustice and patriarchy as side effects or rather elements of ongoing militarization. A gender-focus approach seems to be necessary for reconciliation and reunification.

Walking Her-Stories—Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace Workshops: Nairobi, Kenya, 27-29 February 2020 and Bujumbura, Burundi, 2-4 March 2020

Aims

The women's Pilgrim Team Visits (PTVs) to various African countries between 2017 and 2019 brought to light the untold suffering and ongoing traumas of women in Africa's conflict and post-conflict contexts. They have made visible women's faith, hope, spirituality, and resilience and have brought valuable lessons about their potential in leadership and in transforming conflicts and wounds. Moreover, they required harvesting and reflection in such a way that they can inform a strategic response from the ecumenical family when coming together at the WCC 11th Assembly, to be held in Karlsruhe, Germany in 2022. This concern prompted two follow-up workshops. These were an opportunity to summarize experiences of African women and churches as expressed during the PTVs and to formulate informed suggestions for the WCC and its member churches when discussing, among other topics, gender injustice and violence against women as a pivotal global agenda and moving forward as a Just Community of Women and Men.

The workshops took place at the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, which has exacerbated domestic violence and abuse. These events were planned for Juba, South Sudan, and Bujumbura, Burundi, to give women, who have undergone traumatic experiences in South Sudan and Burundi because of years of protracted conflict, and church leaders an additional opportunity to share their experiences, proposals, and best practices for transformation, two years after their first visit by women PTVs (2017–2018). The workshops also provided space for cross-national sharing and reflection.

Objectives for the workshops (among others)

- to assess the impact of trauma on women affected by war and conflict, learn about their coping mechanisms and strategies as women leaders in these situations, and draw lessons from past experiences and interventions
- to encourage the churches to come up with programmatic response strategies
- to discuss how to effectively curb and end the practice and culture of SGBV in families, societies, and churches and in times of armed conflicts
- to contribute to the preparation of the WCC's 11th Assembly in September 2022 in Karlsruhe, Germany, and to strategize for engagement, empowerment, and support of women leaders (especially the young) beyond the Karlsruhe assembly

Participants and Structure of the Workshops

Most international participants of the workshops had been pilgrims or hosts in former African women's PTVs and/or are members of the WCC central committee and/or the WCC's Pilgrimage for Justice and Peace (PJP) Reference Group: women and church leaders from Nigeria, Liberia, Uganda, Kenya, Australia, the US, Germany, Norway, Finland, and Russia. Staff from the WCC, All African Council of Churches (AACC), Fellowship of Christian Councils and Churches in the Great Lakes and Horn of Africa (FECCLAHA), Lutheran World Federation (LWF), and World Baptist Alliance joined the international team. Members of the National Council of Churches (NCC) leadership or staff—male and female—plus church leaders from both countries made up 30 to 50 percent of the participants.

Both workshops followed the same structure:

- Each day started with devotional reflection on the overall topic of the workshop.
- The first day was dedicated to experience sharing on SGBV, trauma, and peace work by participants from South Sudan (1) and Burundi (2) and from countries visited earlier.
- The second day was dedicated to harvesting and reflecting.
- The third day focused on identifying key issues and lessons to be learned for discussions in Karlsruhe.

The workshops were facilitated by two members of the PJP Reference Group: the moderator of the WCC and the president of Bread for the World Germany, with assistance by research and development consultants (Transforming, Analyzing, Accompanying and Building Change Organizations [TAABCO], Nairobi).

Workshop in Lukenya Gate Away, Kenya, 27-29 February 2020

The first workshop had been planned for the end of February 2020 in Juba, South Sudan. Due to perceived security concerns in Juba, it was moved to the outskirts of Nairobi, Kenya, but was nonetheless hosted by the South Sudan Council of Churches (SSCC) and welcomed by its general secretary and its chairperson. Five more members of the SSCC leadership and staff and the AACC ecumenical accompanier for South Sudan (from Uganda) made their way to Kenya.

As was the case during the first PTV to South Sudan, the wounds and pain of the country's people, especially women of Sudan but also from Nigeria, spoke loudly to the workshop participants. The sessions were very moving and tearful. Joint prayer during sessions and biblical reflections became a haven of comfort and hope for the entire meeting.

In addition to the overall objectives, participants raised expectations for the workshop to become an opportunity for healing of their wounds and regaining hope and for learning what a process of healing and reconciliation between perpetrators and victims could look like as well as how communities could become empowered to drive such processes.

South Sudan Women and Churches Sharing Their Experiences

Many people in South Sudan have suffered untold trauma as a result of several decades of war and conflict. The worst effects have been on women and children, as well as on people with disabilities and the elderly. Women were sexually abused and were forced to see their own mothers or daughters being raped and their husbands, brothers, and sons being killed in cold blood. Many women and children were caught up in outbreaks of brutal violence and have seen dead bodies in huge numbers.

The war in South Sudan has created a series of refugee crises, causing additional traumas. Many families were separated and dispersed. Physical abuse like rape followed women and girls as they moved from one place to another in an effort to reunite with their families; as they settled in refugee camps, where the conflicts continue; and as they walk outside the refugee camps and face militia attacks and violations by state security officers. All this leaves a trail of painful memories with women and children that sometimes leads to mental breakdowns.

What kept women moving and sustaining hope was the sense of family among themselves as women within the church: joint spirituality, mutual support of all kinds, and some moments of

training they received from church women's organizations in trauma healing and transformation. These enabled some to forgive perpetrators of violence against them and their family members.

The role women played in community mobilization for peace through the South Sudan Women Prayer and Fasting Movement, an inclusive movement of women across denominations and tribes starting in 2013–2014, is outstanding (see also the report of the PTV to South Sudan in May 2018). It is a strong expression of putting faith into action and of the power of prayers.

Multiple achievements include regaining mental strength, mobilization of people for peace, unity and social peace between women and people across tribes and political parties, recognition of their strong potential as peacemakers, and a change of cultural stereotypes about women's place and role. Due to church women's strength and impact, the church in South Sudan received special recognition as an actor in the peace process and is given room for input into the ongoing political process.

Challenges faced by the movement include public ridicule and mocking, targeting of individual leaders, and lack of resources and of a response from sections of the church leadership.

According to their own statements during the workshop, the churches had not embraced the plight of the suffering populations—particularly not of women—in South Sudan for a long time, even though many churches continued to receive people seeking refuge from the violence. The support offered was based on an inadequate understanding of trauma and occasionally even contributed to further victimization of women due to the clergy's perceptions of victims of SGBV.

Local pastors, too, are in need of counselling and transformation, which they have so far not received. Overwhelmed by the need to respond to the rising influx of refugees and IDPs into church compounds and by their stories, they became traumatized and to a certain degree were tempted to become partisan, forgetting their call for forgiveness and reconciliation.

Furthermore, the stories and experiences shared by women from across geographical divides provided take-away lessons and illustrated that there are commonalities when it comes to how women are denied their rights, voices, and the right to life across Africa. The stories of resilience among women show that it is possible for them to endure the pain and suffering as they continue to engage.

In the closing session, women affirmed that, besides solidarity among women, faith is the only source of hope, strength, and power during conflict. Bible reading and prayers are very strong sources for persistence and perseverance. Prayer is a very strong power on individual and collective levels and is underestimated by those in power.

Church leaders admitted that through listening to the women, their eyes had been opened to new realities, and their understanding of issues had deepened. They affirmed the need for solidarity and accompaniment. In his closing words, the chairman of the SSCC expressed concern about the huge impact of trauma in South Sudan. For too long, the South Sudanese have lived in denial, and the SSCC has not paid the proper attention that the situation deserved. He promised to make trauma healing a priority focus for the council.

Other learnings and recommendations from both workshops were similar and are therefore summarized in tandem below.

Workshop in Bujumbura, Burundi, 2-4 March 2020

The workshop was hosted by the CNEB, and the welcome was offered by its president. Nine members of the council plus former leadership and staff participated, as did the director from the Bible Society, CNEB. There was some overlap of participants from the Nairobi and South Sudan workshop.

In addition to the overall objectives, participants wanted to learn about trauma coping mechanisms and strategies for addressing SGBV and about the role and impact of women in peacebuilding in other countries. Responding to the unique challenges facing women with disabilities in the contexts of war and conflict was another special concern.

Burundi women and churches sharing their experiences

(For the Burundi background, see the report of the first PTV to Burundi, above.)

The women and children of Burundi have suffered the brunt of the violent conflicts in the country since the early 1990s. Aggression toward them is used to coerce and pressure men from the opposing sides of the conflict—the “owners” of the women. Rape has become a weapon of war that leaves behind a trail of pain and untold traumas on women and girls. Culture keeps them silent about their sufferings and restricts their expressions of grief. Also, it considers victims of SGBV ineligible for marriage, thus aggravating the trauma.

Women who conceived from these heinous acts are usually rejected by their families. The conflicts are leaving behind traumatized and broken families and women who have lost all sense of the meaning of their lives and the capacity to develop their own or society’s life. Women working for peace and supporting communities in conflict and war situations are repeatedly exposed to gruesome scenes and to violence against themselves; they thus have to struggle with trauma while working with traumatized people. Mental illness in Burundi is on the rise.

Burundi women further face a number of cultural and economic challenges, as reflected in a Burundian saying: “Women are owned but do not own anything.” This massive asymmetry between the two genders promotes domestic violence and impacts their day-to-day relationships, especially in rural communities. CNEB’s “Side by Side” initiative aims to encourage men to dialogue with their wives as partners, to appreciate the role of women, to work hand in hand with them, and to provide space for their active participation in domestic as well as public affairs. Progress is slow, as many men cling to the old order which guarantees them unlimited power over their family members.

CNEB has responded in different ways, collectively and through individual member churches’ initiatives, to prevent further escalation of political violence and support for displaced persons. The church in Burundi, through the CNEB, has been at the forefront in brokering peace at the political level.

CNEB becoming active in trauma healing

For many years, the church in Burundi neither recognized the need nor had the necessary skills and knowledge to help address the pain of highly traumatized women and children; rather, it treated them like any other congregant.

Due to a number of visits and interventions by the WCC and the ecumenical family, the church leadership in Burundi has become motivated and is finally equipped to take the issue seriously and start putting programmes in place to address it. Special reference was given to the first ecumenical

delegation of women who visited the CNEB in November 2017 as part of the PJP Team Visits and to the Bible Society of Burundi, with its Trauma Healing and Reconciliation program, supporting local churches to provide compassionate responses to traumatized people in their communities. The CNEB and its member churches have invested in their own capacity building; recently, they started reaching out to traumatized women and children. With the support of FECCLAHA, the Tamar campaign—developed by two universities in South Africa and in Kenya—has been introduced to member churches of the CNEB. Programmes are running in a number of them, helping to heal wounds of individuals and to reconcile broken communities. The resource manual that the WCC prepared, *Healing the Wounds of Trauma*, which had been discussed with several pilot councils of churches to improve it further, was also reported as being very helpful.

Burundian churches need more input and resources from the ecumenical family. The need for trauma healing and for knowledge about trauma processing in the Burundian society and church is extremely high. Leaders—including religious leaders—at all levels need to be empowered to take part in the healing facilitation for communities. Due to their engagement in trauma healing so far, churches are receiving overwhelming requests for extending their programmes to, for example, members of the police, military officers, and prison officers; at the same time, they lack the resources to do so. In 2020, the country was embarking on truth, healing, and reconciliation, but being new to this work, the church and government institutions need knowledge and capacity to deliver on this promise. They also require the sharing of best practices and accompaniment in counselling as they excavate the tombs of those killed earlier.

Women as peacebuilders

FECCLAHA reported on its programmes within the framework of their specific focus on women in peacebuilding. The Regional Faith Women Mediators Network program, which started in 2017 across religions to accompany peace processes in the region, provides peer learning for women to be brought back into the peace processes in their countries. Lessons learned include the power of grassroots mobilization, the added value of including women in ecumenical prayers, the power of accompaniment of national women's processes in peacebuilding, and the value of engaging youth in peacebuilding.

Experiences from other countries and ecumenical organizations highlighted, among others:

- the issues of a continuous flow of arms into the Great Lakes Region's violent conflicts and the problem of international interventions fuelling and prolonging national conflicts and undermining national peacebuilding efforts
- the disproportionate marginalization, exclusion, and suffering of women with disabilities during violent conflicts, who are exposed to particular risks and have specific support and protection needs which are not recognized in any programmes for IDPs or peace negotiations; due to the culture: people (and churches) often do not recognize them as human beings and fail to see their potential and the gifts they may bring with them
- globally, female leaders and journalists face growing resistance against their presence in public and against their participation in decision-making processes, through all means, including hate messages, threats, and attacks of SGBV and murder. Responding to this global backlash, churches should shy away from discriminatory language against women and advocate against hate speech and violence against women

In the concluding remarks, it was noted that although global ecumenical family members need to support each other through sharing of resources, materials, and programmes to enable the necessary changes, national councils of churches remain strategically responsible for providing the mobilization and coordinating role of the churches in addressing and transforming trauma and combating domestic violence as well as violence against women as means of war.

Other learnings and recommendations from both workshops were very similar and therefore are summarized in tandem (see below).

Recommendations (from both workshops)

Reconciliation

Breaking cycles of violence is important so that communities do not relapse into destructive conflicts. Inclusive community discourse that provides for forgiveness, healing, and rebuilding of previously torn social fabric is necessary.

Although Truth, Justice, and Reconciliation Campaigns (TJRCs) were organized in a number of post-conflict countries, and while positive outcomes were noted, creating mutual spaces for perpetrators and victims alike has become imperative to promote their coming together to confess their sins and seek honest reconciliation. Reconciliation is a process and must be achieved in context, not in a vacuum (or, for South Sudan, for example, within the framework of the Action Plan for Peace for South Sudan [APP]).

Conflict contexts are diverse, and dynamics change over time. Reconciliation initiatives will not only have to be context-sensitive (based on analysis) but be situated within communities along with affected people and groups. Community-based platforms can be effective for ensuring viable results of the ongoing SSCC Power to Forgive campaign.

Reconciliation will need to take place at various levels—individual, family, community, and national—as advocacy should do, too. Training materials, assessment tools, and documentation tools should be provided to pastors to support their or the congregation’s reconciliation work.

The dissemination of proper information and awareness-raising by the churches via radio broadcast and other mass media are required to counter the often-fast-moving destructive lies and hate speeches.

Women mediators participating in the Tamar campaign and other campaigns have been very effective in connecting with rural women and other grassroots structures, thereby building resilience against incitement and manipulation to violence. More women mediators need to be trained.

There is a close link between gender work and peace work. Successful peace processes are anchored in addressing gender injustices as one key factor, among others.

Addressing the needs of traumatized people (especially women and girls)

Trauma as a result of violent conflicts, war, and SGBV is real. This reality confronts churches, communities, and governments every day. Denial of this very reality—particularly by leaders—is a big obstacle to effective response: trauma that is not transformed is transferred! The conflict cycle cannot be broken unless the issue of trauma is addressed. Churches are called to, and well-suited for, trauma response based on faith and professional knowledge. The global ecumenical family needs to step up efforts and empower the churches in this area.

Trauma lives with both the person experiencing it and the one listening to the stories of trauma. Programmes targeted at healing the healers should be encouraged and supported and should address trauma healing facilitators, pastors, women leaders, and counsellors. Efforts should be made to train and transform victims to become healers.

Provision should be made to reach out to and support people on the ground to cope with their traumas during hot conflict times when their region is not accessible from outside: the use of media and technology (like mobile cell phones and digital platforms) is imperative.

Responses to trauma should consider its impact at the individual, family, and community levels. Interventions should be context-specific, should be different for different groups, and should respect that healing is cyclical: it is a long process and not an event. It starts with the provision of immediate survival needs before embarking on healing and transformation. The reintegration of survivors into the larger family and communities must be secured at the end of the process. The ecumenical family should collaboratively mobilize resources for this long and complex process of interventions.

Churches should create safe spaces for women and children who are expressing their pain and should offer them opportunities for sharing their suffering with others. Churches' trauma work should address the restoration of dignity, self-esteem, self-image, and hope through faith.

The healing process does not start and end with the victims. The perpetrators need to accept their responsibility, repent, and commit to walking with the victims through the healing process. Contextualized national and official reparations for trauma victims are necessary. Advocating for the enactment of TJRCs and cooperation with them is crucial.

The church cannot handle all the needs presented through conflict-inflicted traumas but should advocate for responsive governments. Where governments have been using violence against their own citizens, the church should unite globally and push for punitive actions against such governments and their members.

The role of the church in curbing SGBV against women and children

The churches' response to SGBV and trauma in and following wars and violent conflicts in Africa is still weak and poorly structured or coordinated—partly due to the fact that men do not understand the pain and suffering of women, yet men exclusively form church leadership.

Churches need to understand that genuine peace work is impossible unless SGBV issues are confronted openly and honestly. This is done by providing spaces for affected women to speak up. Churches should embrace and include victims and provide opportunities for full participation. SGBV starts with misconceptions and wrongful stereotypes about women and men and their roles and is followed by discrimination fostered by the culture. When women are viewed as animals, or likened to them, violence is around the corner. African cultures allow for practices violating women's dignity and their mental and physical integrity, and not only in times of war. Teachers, officers, security forces and even clergy are misusing their power over women and girls to grant access to education and good grades, employment, security, and humanitarian services. The suffering of women does not begin in war contexts (think of forced marriages of very young girls, regular domestic violence), but war contexts reinforce violence against women.

Churches should reflect the contribution of their own teachings and behaviour toward harmful stereotypes which pave the way for violence against women and children, following the culture

rather than the gospel. Churches should discern the difference between culture and the gospel of Christ and critique life- and dignity-denying cultural practices from a gospel standpoint.

The churches should target stereotypes and socialization that discriminates against girls and women and encourages men to use violence in their families. They should better educate and counsel married couples and families. They should create spaces and platforms for conversation on these issues and address and correct false and toxic understandings of masculinity and femininity, particularly among youths.

The church should make efforts to break the culture of silence, encourage the speaking of and bringing out of truths publicly, and document and publish cases, including the numbers and magnitude involved.

Participants felt that it is time for the church to end complicity with violence against women and children and advocate for the church sanctuary to be a safe space for victims of SGBV and other affected or vulnerable groups in the community. Church leadership should be encouraged to constitute and institutionalize accountability mechanisms within the church. It is worse for SGBV victims of faith to be violated by God's people using God's word, thus poisoning their only source of hope and resilience. Putting its own house in order is a prerequisite for effectively advocating against and curbing SGBV. No perpetrator should continue to serve in a position where he can continue to suppress the voices of victims. The church should explore the most ideal and relevant punishment within the given context, encourage apologies, and facilitate forgiveness.

Finally, the church should address systems and structures that perpetuate SGBV and other forms of violence against women and children within churches, communities, and governments. Advocacy for legal frameworks and the implementation of respective laws is key in the fight against SGBV and should be enhanced. However, laws on their own do not make a difference: knowledge and mobilization of the grassroots remain paramount for enabling real action.

Inclusion and empowerment of people living with disabilities, women, and youth

Churches should acknowledge that all children of God are created in God's image. They should promote the inclusion of women, youths, and people living with disabilities (PLWDs) in decision making and provide space for all PLWDs, women, and youths to appreciate their strengths and capacities and celebrate diversity.

Churches should help disadvantaged groups such as PLWDs, women, and children to build confidence and self-esteem and should encourage them to amplify their talents.

Future Action Points (taken from both workshops)

- Issues related to trauma in conflict and post-conflict contexts should have a high profile at the next WCC assembly and be embedded in the WCC's programmatic infrastructure for the forthcoming strategic period to provide:
 - capacity building for women and others working in conflict and post-conflict contexts in such areas as community-based psychosocial counselling and trauma healing
 - sharing of manuals and tools for processing trauma, such as the WCC publication *Healing Together*, the Arc of Healing programme from the CNEB, and the Tamar campaign used by FECCLAHA

- support for churches to train their own pastors and staff to understand trauma and the long process of trauma healing, with its complexities, reconciliation, and the transformation of people's own traumas: healing the healers
- Empowerment of women as peacemakers through:
 - documentation and dissemination of best practices of women's peace programmes and campaigns
 - systematic support of programmes, regional or global networks, and materials for faith women mediators (such as the one run by FECCLAHA) or peace campaigners
- Empowerment of women—particularly young women—within the ecumenical family through:
 - facilitating networking and setting up mentoring programmes between senior church women from within the ecumenical family and young female ecumenical activists, including women living with disabilities
- Violence against women:
 - Motivate and support churches to raise their voices against systems and structures that perpetuate violence against women and to become change makers in curbing violence against women.
 - Place SGBV and the impact of trauma on women, children, and other vulnerable groups caused by SGBV high on the agenda at the WCC assembly in Karlsruhe (in plenary, Ecumenical Conversations, and workshops).
 - As the WCC, discuss and challenge root causes, systems, and structures that perpetuate violence against women, tackle inequalities in society and church.
 - Whatever the ecumenical programming around the issue, understand that SGBV is a global issue: programming on it should be global yet contextualized for specific continents and should follow a bottom-up approach that draws from the voices of women in the communities.
 - Systematically promote the Thursdays in Black (TiB) campaign within WCC member churches and have them own it as a potentially powerful tool of public awareness raising; use it to elevate the reality and magnitude of trauma of women and youths due to SGBV. Use TiB to collect, publish, and disseminate prayers, poems, and Bible studies on the issues of SGBV and trauma.
 - Ecumenical programmes need to provide church leaders with materials, instructions, and opportunities for joint theological reflections on how to respond to the issues of SGBV within the church, in public, and within the political class. Toolkits could be developed and rolled out; those that exist within the ecumenical family should be shared.
 - Wherever possible, the WCC's Commission of Churches in International Affairs (CCIA) should address the issue of impunity for perpetrators of SGBV.
 - Pay special attention in all programmes and materials to women living with disabilities.

Appendix 2: List of Abbreviations

General

AACC	All African Council of Churches
CCIA	Commission of Churches in International Affairs (World Council of Churches)
EHAIA	Ecumenical HIV and AIDS Initiatives and Advocacy
FECCLAHA	Fellowship of Christian Councils and Churches in the Great Lakes and Horn of Africa
FECIWA	Federation of Councils of Churches in West Africa
IDP	internally displaced people
LWF	Lutheran World Federation
NCC	National Council of Churches
PJP	Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace
PWLD	people living with disabilities
PTV	Pilgrim Team Visits
REO	regional ecumenical organization
SGBV	sexual and gender-based violence
TiB	Thursday in Black campaign
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
WCC	World Council of Churches

Visit to Nigeria, August 2017

CAN	Christian Association of Nigeria
CCEPI	Centre for Caring, Empowerment and Peace Initiative
CCN	Christian Council of Nigeria
EDAN	Ecumenical Disability Advocacy Network
EYN	Ekklesiyar Yan'uwa a Nigeria/Church of the Brethren in Nigeria
FOMWAN	Federation of Muslim Women Association of Nigeria
LCCN	Lutheran Church of Christ in Nigeria
TAABCO	Transforming, Analyzing, Accompanying and Building Change Organizations
WAVE	Women Affected by Violent Extremism
WOWICAN	Women Wing of Christian Association of Nigeria
WOWICCN	Women Wing of the Christian Council of Nigeria

Visit to South Sudan, May 2018

SSCC	South Sudan Council of Churches
WCRC	World Communion of Reformed Churches

Visit to the Democratic Republic of Congo, August 2018

DRC	Democratic Republic of Congo
ECC	Church of Christ in Congo (Église de Christ en Congo)

Visit to South Korea, July 2020

DMZ	Demilitarized zone
KAWT	Korean Association of Women Theologians
KWSCS	Korean Women's Society for Christian Service
NCKK	National Council of Churches in Korea
PCK	Presbyterian Church of Korea
PROK	Presbyterian Church in the Republic of Korea
WMP	Women Making Peace

Workshop in Kenya, February 2020

APP	Action Plan for Peace for South Sudan
SSCC	South Sudan Council of Churches
TJRC	Truth, Justice and Reconciliation Campaign (Sudan)
TAABCO	Transforming, Analyzing, Accompanying and Building Change Organizations

Workshop in Burundi, March 2020

CNEB	National Council of Churches of Burundi
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Appendix 3: Explanatory Notes

Sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) is sexual violence that is directed at an individual, based on her or his specific gender role in society. While it can affect both females and males, SGBV affects women and girls disproportionately. This is violence that establishes or reinforces gender hierarchies and perpetuates gender inequalities. According to the International Federation of Women Lawyers (FIDA), SGBV attacks the fundamental human rights of adults and children alike. (FIDA, 2006)

Trauma is the natural response to a deeply distressing or disturbing event that overwhelms an individual's ability to cope. It causes feelings of helplessness and diminishes people's sense of self and their ability to feel the full range of emotions and experiences (Elhai, Kashdan & Frueh, 2005). An event is considered traumatic when a person is confronted with death or fear of dying or when his or her physical integrity or that of another person may have been threatened. Often such events also cause intense fear. Sometimes it may lead to helplessness or horror. (American Psychiatric Association, 1994)

Persons at higher risk of SGBV are usually vulnerable and include those whose family and community structures have been destroyed, the displaced, persons with disabilities, older persons, children and adolescents, members of LGBTIQI communities, female heads of households, and persons in conflict situations.

SGBV-related trauma is manifested in various ways, including, but not limited to, self-harm/hatred, suicidal tendencies, shift in personality, depression, flashbacks, substance abuse, dissociation, eating and sleep disorders, and violent tendencies.