

Joint Message of Thursdays in Black Ambassadors on Gender-based Violence, Sexual Abuse and Faith Communities

The scourge of sexual and gender-based violence continues unabated.

As ambassadors for Thursdays in Black, and in our various leadership capacities, we have witnessed the increase in domestic and gender-based violence, including child marriage, in many countries during the COVID-19 pandemic, arising out of necessary movement restrictions and economic uncertainty.

With the rise of digital communication, there is increased online sexual abuse and harassment with devastating effects on individuals, families and communities.

We see that violence against women is a means through which patriarchy continues and patriarchal structures sustain themselves. At a time when important hard-won women's rights are being reversed and patriarchal values re-asserted, we are committed to not only ending violence against women but pushing back against patriarchy itself.

In this global context, one reality shocks us to the core: the abuse carried out within our faith communities and the consistent silence and denial by local, national and global leadership that has permitted it to take place.

We cannot be silent in the knowledge that some in our faith communities choose to use their power and authority to protect the institution, and at times the perpetrators, rather than seek justice for victims and survivors of gender-based violence, sexual abuse and harassment.

We cannot deny that for decades – and no doubt throughout history – some who profess faith in the Divine and commit to service for people horrifically abuse the trust placed in them.

We lament that far too many times, those who bravely come forward to share their stories are not believed, are shamed, are blamed, or are ignored. Too many times we have seen victims silenced and perpetrators unpunished.

Because all human beings are created with equal dignity, we weep when violence – spiritual, mental, physical and sexual - is directed to people because they are lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender or of other identities.

We are heartened by the global growth of Thursdays in Black movement and the visible solidarity we share across our faith traditions to overcome rape and violence.

Many of our organizations and faith communities have spoken out publicly against gender-based violence.¹ Most recently, the [World Council of Churches \(WCC\) Central Committee](#) called on its member churches and ecumenical partners to “condemn or reiterate their condemnation of sexual and gender-based violence and of any form of violence against

women, children and vulnerable people; to declare violence as a rejection of the equal dignity of all people and such violence a sin; and to implement guidelines for the prevention of sexual exploitation, abuse and harassment.”

We echo the WCC statement and call for faith communities and organizations to clearly and definitively commit to overcoming sexual and gender-based violence beginning in our own places of prayer and our structures of service.

We call on our faith communities to take the next step in practical action to ensure such violence does not happen in our own spaces. Following the WCC central committee recommendation, we invite all faith communities to state their commitment to overcoming sexual and gender-based violence, clearly and publicly, including the policies and steps they will take when abuse is reported. Access to support and justice for survivors must be integrated in our responses.

We welcome religious and theological reflection and education which interrogates our holy scriptures on the relationships between men and women and masculinities and femininities, our understandings of gender and gender identity, and our relationships with all people as part of humanity.

We encourage all people of faith to join us in Thursdays in Black to raise awareness and advocate for a world without rape and violence.

As the WCC fellowship gathers for its assembly in Germany, we pray that our words and actions are amplified to strengthen our collective commitment to overcoming sexual and gender-based violence, and provide a clear example with all religious faiths, of justice and peace for all, in every place.

Representative statements:

Religions for Peace World Council: <https://www.rfp.org/statement-of-the-religions-for-peace-world-council-on-international-womens-day/>

World YWCA Pledge to support LGBTIQ women and marginalised genders:

<https://shespeaksworldywca.org/this-internationalwomensday2021-world-ywca-invites-all-to-sign-a-pledge-to-support-lgbtqi-women-and-marginalised-genders/>

Signed as of 9 August, 2022:

Bishop Ivan M. Abrahams, General Secretary, World Methodist Council and Bishop
Rosemarie Wenner, Geneva Secretary, World Methodist Council

Dr Agnes Abuom, Moderator, Central Committee of the World Council of Churches

Rev. Claudia Bandixen, former Director, Mission 21

Rev. Michael Blair, General Secretary, General Council, The United Church of Canada

Bishop Elizabeth A. Eaton, Presiding Bishop, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

Dr Mohamed Elsanousi, Executive Director, Network of Religious and Traditional Peacemakers

Rev. Dr Chris Ferguson, former General Secretary, World Communion of Reformed Churches

Rev. Prof. Dr.h.c. Cornelia Füllkrug-Weitzel, former President of Brot für die Welt" and "Diakonie Katastrophenhilfe

Ms. Larissa Aguiar Garcia, Igreja Metodista do Brasil

Ms Colleen Geyer, General Secretary Uniting Church in Australia, Assembly

Rev. Dr Anders Göranson, General Secretary, Swedish Bible Society

Ms Nyaradzayi Gumbonzvanda, Founder and Chief Executive, Rozaria Memorial Trust

Ms Casey Harden, General Secretary, World YWCA

Mr Jouni Hemberg, Executive Director. Finn Church Aid

Rev Sharon Hollis, President, Uniting Church in Australia, Assembly

Bishop Susan Johnson, National Bishop, Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada

Ms. Alison Judd, World President, World Federation of Methodist and Uniting Church Women

Prof. Dr Azza Karam, Secretary General, Religions for Peace

Marcelo D. Leites, Secretary General, World Student Christian Federation

Most Rev. Dr Tapio Luoma, Archbishop, The Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland

Rev. Damon Mkandawire, Hospital Administrator, Mbereshi Mission Hospital, The United Church of Zambia

Philip Vinod Peacock, Executive for Justice and Witness, as part of the Collegial General Secretariat, World Communion of Reformed Churches

Ms Rhee, Hanbeet, Presbyterian Church of Korea and National YWCA of Korea

Ms Jessica Roland, Senior Specialist for Inclusive Peace, Network of Religious and Traditional Peacemakers

Rev. Dr. Karen Georgia A. Thompson, Associate General Minister for Wider Church Ministries and Operations and Co-Executive for Global Ministries, United Church of Christ

Rt Rev. Dr Olav Fykse Tveit, Presiding Bishop, Church of Norway