



World Council of Churches

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Greetings on the occasion of the 85th birthday of Rev. Dr Konrad Raiser

Geneva, 20 January 2023

Dear Konrad,

As you celebrate your 85th birthday, I am writing to assure you of my prayer for God's blessings on you and Elisabeth, and wish both of you good health and wellbeing.

It is a particular pleasure for me to be able to send these greetings as I begin my own service as general secretary of the World Council of Churches. We remain deeply indebted for all that you have contributed to the World Council of Churches and the wider ecumenical movement for more than 50 years: as study secretary in the Secretariat for Faith and Order which you joined in 1969 when you were 31; as deputy general secretary to Philip Potter from 1973 to 1983; as professor for systematic and ecumenical theology at the University of the Ruhr in Bochum from 1983 to 1993; and as general secretary of the WCC from 1993 to 2003. You have continued to offer support and encouragement to the WCC, symbolized most recently by your presence at the WCC's 11th Assembly in Karlsruhe last year.

As general secretary you helped to steer the WCC through the epochal changes that the world experienced after 1989 –the end of communism in Eastern Europe and military dictatorships in Latin America, the development of economic globalization, and the overcoming of apartheid in my country of South Africa, symbolized by the presence of President Nelson Mandela at the WCC's 8th Assembly in Harare 1998 after the many years of steadfast support from the WCC through the Programme to Combat Racism.

I think also of your commitment as general secretary to reinforcing the Common Understanding and Vision of the WCC, your belief in the need to open up and create an "ecumenical space" for the fellowship of churches, allowing communion to grow and reconciliation to take place, and your support for the creation of a forum of Christian churches and ecumenical organizations to foster wider relationships beyond membership in the WCC, which has found form in the Global Christian Forum.

In particular, your sensitive leadership played a crucial role in the Special Commission on Orthodox Participation in the WCC, which reported in your final year as general secretary.

This year we will be celebrating one of the earliest activities in which you were involved in your time as Faith and Order study secretary, with the 50th anniversary of the Leuenberg Agreement between Lutheran, Reformed, and United churches in Europe and beyond. You took part in the final stages of this agreement, which was able to overcome the doctrinal condemnations of the Reformation period and declare ecclesial communion between the participating churches

Many will still remember the WCC's 6th Assembly in Vancouver in 1983 planned under your leadership as deputy general secretary, which remains a high point of ecumenical witness and fellowship. You played an important role in one of the main outcomes of that assembly – the Conciliar Process for Justice, Peace and the Integrity of Creation – which has set us the continuing challenge to work for just peace as well as for justice for all of God's creation. You continued after your retirement as general secretary to reflect on the challenges of justice, violence and nonviolence in your work on the *Ecumenical Call to just Peace* and the International Ecumenical Peace Convocation in Kingston, Jamaica, in 2011. This led to the creation of the Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace after the WCC's 10th Assembly in Busan in 2013.

In your book, *The Challenge of Transformation* you wrote of how pilgrimage is a dynamic and open ended concept, where those who are journeying together come from different directions, having left their secure places and being prepared to be transformed and renewed through their encounters on the pilgrimage. You described this as a powerful image for understanding what the ecumenical movement is all about.

As I embark on my own ministry as general secretary of the World Council of Churches, I am honoured to join you on this ecumenical pilgrimage, to be transformed and renewed. I extend again my greetings to you on your 85th birthday, and ask for God's blessing on you and Elisabeth and your whole family.

Yours in faith,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Jerry Pillay', written in a cursive style.

Rev. Prof. Dr Jerry Pillay
General Secretary
World Council of Churches