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## **Report of the General Secretary**

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Moderator, Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

1. As I write this report, my first one as general secretary, to the central committee, I am reminded that we are in the season of Pentecost. Before his ascension, Jesus asked his disciples (Acts 1:4-5) to wait for the promise of the Holy Spirit before they would go out to proclaim good news to the world about the Risen Christ. Waiting for the Holy Spirit is important as it clearly establishes that we should not do God's work on our own strength and wisdom but that we should rely on the presence and power of the Holy Spirit to lead us at all times.

2. In the power of the Holy Spirit, the disciples went out and witnessed to the saving grace and love of Jesus Christ, bringing new hope and life to the world. As we contend with the many challenges in the world today, we should be reminded that the same Spirit comes to resurrect hope and peace in a troubled and broken world. The Spirit reminds us afresh that we are not alone, God is with us, empowering and transforming us as God's disciples in a world that is torn apart by sin, suffering, and the evil one. The Holy Spirit points us to the work of Jesus and assures us that in Christ we shall overcome because Jesus, through his death and resurrection, has given us salvation, new life, hope, and joy.

3. This year we celebrate the seventy-fifth anniversary of the WCC since its inception in 1948; we will take moments to celebrate this special event during the central committee but, especially on Sunday, 25 June, with a special celebration. We thank God for directing and leading us all through these years, especially when ecumenical organizations have struggled in a variety of ways over time. Indeed, the WCC has been guided, strengthened, and blessed by the presence and wisdom of the Holy Spirit. We are thankful for the many member churches and partners who have served the fellowship over these many decades. There are so many people who have served as moderators, vice-moderators, presidents, central committee members, executive committee members, and many more have participated in reference and advisory groups in the WCC. We acknowledge their contributions with thanksgiving and joy, recognizing that some of them have long or recently departed from this earth to be with the Lord.

4. Recently we were quite shocked to hear about the passing of our dear beloved former moderator, Dr Agnes Abuom. Indeed, her contributions to the WCC are enormous, spanning many decades. We are grateful for her leadership over the last eight years, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic and the transition of senior leadership within the WCC. It is no surprise that we have received hundreds of messages expressing thanks for her leadership and life. We celebrate her life and service, as we also celebrate others who have served the fellowship and are no longer with us. We pray that Agnes will find rest from her labour and rejoice in the eternal presence of our loving and compassionate God.

5. Although I have served as general secretary for a limited time during the past six months, there is just so much to report on. Such is the life and work of the council. It is always engaged with so many

activities, and staff are constantly at work in a variety of ways, fulfilling their respective roles and responsibilities. This report will by no means cover all the work of the fellowship. It is hoped that my monthly accountability reports, information on the WCC website and on social media will enable you to get deeper insight to the broad work of the WCC since the beginning of this year.

6. One of the key discussions at this central committee is the approval of the Strategic Plan (SP) for the next eight years until the next Assembly in 2030. In light of the new SP, I wish to frame this report in the context of the four strategic objectives of the WCC as outlined in the Busan assembly and reaffirmed with slight changes at the Karlsruhe assembly in 2023. The strategic objectives are to:

- Strengthen the fellowship and deepen solidarity and communion
- Witness together as transforming disciples
- Encourage spirituality, reflection, and formation, and
- Foster innovative and inspiring communication.

7. With the above as the framework for this report, I will reflect a little on the theme of the Karlsruhe assembly, provide insight to the Strategic Plan 2023-2030, share information about some of our current programmatic work, and offer a vision for the WCC.

## The Karlsruhe assembly

8. The 11th WCC Assembly in Karlsruhe, Germany, was indeed a spectacular and memorable celebration. It was so fantastic to see over 4,000 people come together to pray, share the joy of fellowship, work, and deliberate together on various matters. We left with a spirit of joy and thanksgiving as we shared our lives, faith, and experiences together in unity and fellowship.

9. The theme for the Assembly was: Christ's love moves us to justice, reconciliation and unity. Indeed, this theme continues to drive the WCC family. In fact, it continues to shape the overarching theme for the WCC's life and work over the next eight years. I shall therefore offer some brief thoughts on this theme, focusing on justice, reconciliation, and unity to introduce its foundational basis for the next Strategic Plan (2023-2030).

10. **Justice** The original title for the pilgrimage to the Karlsruhe assembly did not include the word *justice* but the assembly, rightly, called for the inclusion of this word again. The scriptures tell us that justice matters to God. The God portrayed in scripture is the "lover of justice": "The King is mighty, he loves justice - you have established equity; in Jacob you have done what is just and right" (Ps. 99:4; cf. Ps. 33:5; 37:28; 111:7; Isa. 30:18; 61:8; Jer. 9:24). We see in his dealings with Israel how God seeks justice for his people. In sympathetic response to the groaning of Hebrew slaves (Ex. 2:23-24), the God "who executes justice for the oppressed" and "gives food to the hungry" (Ps. 146:7) pushed Moses to become the liberator, smashed the shackles of Pharaoh, and led the people to a new homeland. God's deliverance became the paradigm of justice for biblical Israel and continues to be so for us today.

11. Injustice was a violation of the covenant and an act of faithlessness. In light of the covenant, to know God is to show justice (Jer. 22:13-16; Micah 6:8). Indeed, justice in the prophetic tradition is a spiritual discipline, an act of worship, without which the value of other spiritual disciplines - prayer, fasting, sacrifice - are negated (Isa. 58:1-10; Amos 5:21-24; Hos. 6:6).

12. Faithfulness to covenant relationships demands a justice that recognizes special obligations, "a preferential option" to widows, orphans, the poor, and aliens - in other words, the economically vulnerable and politically oppressed (Ex. 23: 6-9; Deut. 15: 2-11; 24:14-22; Jer. 22:16; Amos 2:6-7; 5:10-12). This tradition of concern for the weak and poor was embodied in the idea of the Jubilee Year (Lev. 25). The Jubilee Year prevented unjust concentrations of power and poverty by requiring the return of

property every fifty years. Similarly, the Year of Release (Deut. 15:1-18) provided amnesty for debtors and liberation of indentured servants every seven years. Justice is not a one-off event; it is a mind set and a process. With justice should come a proportionate response, mercy, and compassion. In this regards justice is a related function of *diakonia* as we work against injustices in the world (Matt. 25:34).

13. **Reconciliation** Christ's love moves us to help people to be brought into spaces to forgive, be forgiven, live justly, and seek *reconciliation*. The love of Christ reconciles a lost and broken world, not only to God but also to the whole created order, which is renewed by the sacrifice of Jesus. The doctrine of reconciliation is a prominent theme in the New Testament, and the theological essence of the concept is expressed in 2 Corinthians 5, which reads:

*So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new! All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting the message of reconciliation to us. So we are ambassadors for Christ, since God is making his appeal through us; we entreat you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. (verses 17-21)*

14. Addressed theologically, the doctrine of reconciliation has several core characteristics, namely: (1) It is a gift from God enshrined in God's universal covenant; (2) as an act of God it has an eschatological character linked also to history; (3) it has a relational character; (4) it has a cosmological character; and (5) it is a ministry. In this sense, reconciliation is God's gift to not only to reconcile fallen humankind with Godself, but also with all humanity and creation.

15. This certainly has implications for the church as it seeks to fulfill its calling to work toward unity and reconciliation of broken humanity and creation because of sin. The church has the prophetic task of pointing to sins that continue to destroy relationships and the priestly task of providing spaces for healing and reconciliation.

16. The church as a reconciled community must display unity, justice, peace, and love. The church should not perpetuate human divisions based on race, ethnicity, gender, etc. Rather, it ought to strive toward justice, reconciliation, and unity. If this is the case, then the church needs to articulate reconciliation and unity within its own life and witness, so that the world may know the love of Christ. The church must work toward the renewal of all relationships and the restoration of human relationships with creation. As reconciled people, Christians have to be the proponents of ecological concerns and the precursors of the restoration of the integrity of creation. Renewal of all relationships includes working with people of other faiths, and even of no faith. Christians are to be the promoters of peace in society and agents in the formation of a new humanity. The church is called to constantly work toward forgiveness, reconciliation, and unity, bearing in mind its agency in transforming society so that all may have the fullness of life.

17. **Unity** Christ's love moves us to *unity*. As you know, the WCC states its vision and mission in the following:

The primary purpose of the fellowship of churches in the World Council of Churches is to call one another to visible unity in one faith and in one Eucharistic fellowship, expressed in worship and common life in Christ, through witness and service to the world, and to advance towards that unity in order that the world may believe. (Article III)

18. Allow me to repeat what I said about unity at the executive committee meeting in May of this year: I know that while many people continue to yearn, pray and work for visible Christian unity some have become disenchanted and despondent on the journey, believing that such is a far fetch

dream and further from reality. Personally, I believe that we must never stop praying and walking and working together to reach that vision and goal. We need to affirm and deepen the desire for Christian unity knowing that this is what Jesus prayed for in John 17:21. Unity is a gift already given to us to appropriate in Christ, unity is not uniformity and, more so, a broken and suffering world is in need of Christians working together towards reconciliation, justice and peace. Our inability to live up to the calling of visible Christian unity should not diminish or blur the ultimate vision. Let us continue to pray and work together so that the world may believe!

19. For seventy-five years, the vision of the WCC has been expressed as a commitment to *stay together, pray together, move together, and act together* as a fellowship of churches seeking visible unity and common witness. Most recently, the 11th Assembly invited the churches to continue their journey together as a Pilgrimage of Justice, Reconciliation, and Unity:

20. We affirm the vision of the WCC for the visible unity of all Christians, and we invite other Christians to share this vision with us. We also invite all people of faith and goodwill to trust, with us, that a different world, a world respectful of the living earth, a world in which everyone has daily bread and life in abundance, a decolonized world, a more loving, harmonious, just, and peaceful world, is possible. In a world weighed down with so much pain, anguish, and fear, we believe that the love we have seen in Christ brings the liberating possibilities of joy, justice for all, and peace with the earth. Moved by the Holy Spirit, compelled by a vision of unity, we journey on together, resolved to practise Christ's love, following his steps as his disciples, and carrying a torch for love in the world, trusting in the promise that Christ's love moves the world to reconciliation and unity. (From the Unity Statement of the 11th Assembly)

21. The theme of the Karlsruhe assembly reminds us that "Christ's love moves us to justice, reconciliation and unity." The same assembly also affirmed the call to a Pilgrimage of Justice, Reconciliation and Unity that is the umbrella theme for our programmes in the new Strategic Plan (SP). The general secretary was requested to lead the process of drawing up a WCC Strategic Plan for the next eight years.

### **Strategic Plan 2023-2030**

22. After an assembly, it is expected that the WCC would draw up a new Strategic Plan to guide, implement, monitor, and evaluate its work into the next eight years. Thus, this SP is presented to this central committee for approval.

23. I started the process of working on a new Strategic Plan with a retreat of the Staff Leadership Group (SLG) in December 2023. The retreat focused on three themes: *celebrating the past, understanding the present and shaping/reimagining the future WCC*. The material from this retreat was then directed to all the other staff for discussion and it became the guiding tool to work on a Strategic Plan for the next eight years.

24. During this process, staff were requested to consolidate, align, and focus all programmes so that we establish a more effective, efficient, and cost-effective structure for the WCC. The staff have responded well to this exercise, and the fruit of these endeavours can already be seen in the work of the WCC. The SLG has factored into their work the envisioned future of the WCC and are taking proactive measures in restructuring the work of the council. Of course, full-scale implementation of the SP will follow only after its approval by this central committee.

25. I would like to add that in developing the Strategic Plan, we were able to consult with more than 70 ecumenical officers, some member churches, regional ecumenical officers, the Working Together meeting, staff, other stakeholders, the leadership of the central committee, WCC presidents, and the Strategic Advisory Group appointed by the executive committee meeting in November 2022. I would like to express my sincere thanks to everyone who participated and contributed to the process of drawing up a new SP for the WCC in a relatively short space of time since January 2023, when the actual work began. I express my heartfelt and sincere thanks to the SLG, who have worked with me to present the final draft document to the central committee.

26. My task in this report is merely to introduce the background to the SP. The SP itself will be presented in another separate session of the central committee for discussions and decision. For the sake of this report, it should be noted that the SP is based on the mandate from the Karlsruhe assembly, it focuses on the reaffirmed strategic objectives of the WCC, and it is directed by key programme goals for the next eight years. Against this background of the SP, the rest of this report is framed in the context of the four strategic objectives and programme priorities:

## 1. Strengthening the fellowship and deepening solidarity

27. As mentioned earlier, unity is the central purpose of the fellowship as we seek to proclaim Christ to the world. It is no easy task holding 352 member churches together with their widely differing views, backgrounds, theological, and doctrinal emphases. However, as already said, it is Christ who has reconciled us through his death and resurrection, and the Holy Spirit continues to encourage our unity, witness, and fellowship. In the midst of challenges, fragmentation, causes of disunity, and struggles, we are enjoined with the task of strengthening the fellowship as we remain involved and committed to Christ and our ecumenical calling to be one that the world may believe.

28. **Visits** As part of the endeavour to strengthen the fellowship, I visited the Ecumenical Patriarch in Constantinople and the Armenian Patriarch in February, and Pope Francis in March 2023. These were significant visits to foster deeper relationships and commitment to the fellowship. I am pleased to report that these respective church leaders strongly affirmed their commitment and support for the WCC. We had very positive support for the Nicaea2025 celebrations and willingness from the Ecumenical Patriarchate to participate in the planning and hosting of the events, among their other sites of current involvement. This remains as a significant opportunity to demonstrate Christian visible unity.

29. **Ukraine** As you know, the current situation in Ukraine continues to destabilize the world at large and is affecting the unity of the Orthodox family, as there are differences of support and perspectives for the different countries. The WCC has made very clear statements condemning the war and asking that the secretariat do everything it can to address the situation in Ukraine. As a response to this imperative, we undertook visits to Ukraine and Russia to meet with the Orthodox Churches in both countries. The intention was to address the issues of the disunity among Orthodox Churches and to see how these churches could assist in peacemaking in the Ukraine context. We invited them to a roundtable later this year with the following objectives and activities:

30. **Objective 1:** Promote unity/peaceful co-existence between the majority Orthodox Churches of Ukraine, in the interests of consolidation and unity in Ukrainian society.

Activities:

- Negotiate with Ukrainian government for assistance in creating conditions conducive to dialogue between Ukrainian Orthodox Church (UOC) and the Orthodox Church of Ukraine (OCU).

- Convene confidential dialogue encounter/s in Geneva between senior representatives of the UOC , OCU, and the Russian Orthodox Church (ROC), to discuss current tensions and conflicts between them and to define measures to reduce tensions and promote peaceful co-existence.

31. *Objective 2*: Contribute to a just peace in Ukraine – meeting in Geneva and/or elsewhere – and to the reduction of tensions and confrontation in the wider world due to this conflict, through multilateral dialogue among the churches as representatives of significant social sectors globally.

Activities:

- Convene roundtable dialogue encounters among senior representatives of WCC member churches and partners from Russia, Ukraine, and all regions of the world to address key ethical issues arising in this context, such as:
  - The Christian role and responsibility in relation to armed conflict and threats of armed force, the biblical calling to be peacemakers, and concerns regarding the misuse of religious language and authority to justify or support armed violence and invasion.
  - Implications for the current conflict in Ukraine.
  - The principle of humanitarian neutrality, and the Christian responsibility and responses in relation to the humanitarian consequences of the conflict.
  - Moral and legal accountability for crimes committed during this conflict.
  - The global consequences of the conflict, and the implications for humanity and the environment.

32. I am pleased to report that the Ukrainian Orthodox Church, the Orthodox Church of Ukraine and the Russian Orthodox Church have given a positive response to participate in the roundtable. The ROC stated that they will consult with the UOC and, in the meantime, the WCC should work on the concept note for the roundtable. We have subsequently completed a draft concept note, parts of which are mentioned above, and sent it to the respective churches for comment and commitment to the process, we are anticipating a positive response. All the churches concerned have affirmed the WCC's longstanding role in peacemaking in conflict situations and see the WCC as a valuable and formidable forum to assist in the Ukraine situation. It is our sincere hope and prayer that, given their views and support for the WCC intervention, they will maintain their stance of full participation. The unity of churches and of the human race is important for the sustenance and flourishing of life for all people and creation. Please continue to keep this matter constantly in your prayers.

33. **Türkiye** As part of the effort of deepening solidarity, I conducted a visit with the ACT Alliance general secretary, Mr Rudelmar Bueno de Faria to the Republic of Türkiye to express solidarity after the earthquake in February. My brief description of what we saw in the visit is captured in my report to the executive committee in May: "it was quite a heart-wrenching experience to see the devastation and displacement of so many communities and, especially, the destruction of Antioch, the place of biblical history and significance. Increasingly, Christians are leaving Türkiye and now with the total desertion of Antioch it seems that Christians will not return to this city. Our member churches there have expressed their concerns about the latter and they are doing all they can to rebuild houses and infrastructure in these communities to encourage Christians, in particular, to return. I am pleased to report that ACT Alliance is offering humanitarian aid to those affected by the earthquake. They are doing the same in Syria as well."

34. Solidarity should express itself in compassion and care. It is not just pity or sorrow but an endeavour to pitch a tent and stay with the suffering and affected people, to get involved with their concerns and struggles. This is not often easy to do but it should not stop us from trying to do what we can since when one part of the body suffers, we all suffer.

35. I shared at the executive committee a desire to start a pastoral-solidarity fund to offer small gifts to people in their situations as a token of goodwill so that we do not go empty-handed when we visit them, as we did in Türkiye. The executive committee requested that I provide more details about the idea of such a fund. I know that there is a concern this may conflict with ACT Alliance. But this is not the intention at all, and it has the support of the general secretary of ACT Alliance. The WCC does not have the inclination or capacity to engage in humanitarian work to the extent that ACT Alliance does, and there is no need for us to do this since the Alliance represents the work of the churches and church agencies in the first place. All I am thinking about is a kind of benevolent fund which will be managed by the WCC general secretary and moderator in consultation with the finance director to assist in cases of special needs.

36. **Regional engagements** In strengthening the fellowship, we are looking at more intentional regional engagements. This is important to bring the regions to the global structures of the WCC and to take the global to the regional. To facilitate this, we have had discussions with the regional ecumenical organizations to find creative and meaningful ways to build relationships. We are exploring possibilities to decentralize some of our programmatic work into regions where the work is most applicable. We have organized our plan for this central committee to listen to the stories of the regions and to deepen solidarity where that is needed. It is vital that we engage with other regional experiences so that we get to know the struggles and successes of other regions, and find encouragement and ideas as to how we may rethink our own situations and learn from one another. We should also facilitate interregional collaborations among regions where possible.

37. **Role of the WCC presidents** I believe that the role of WCC presidents can help us to achieve the unity and synergy we need to foster within, and from, the regions. I have met a few times online with the presidents thus far, and recently we spent some time talking about their role and responsibilities. The constitution does not say much about the role of the presidents, but that does not prevent us from trying to draw up some key pointers to their roles without transgressing current constitutional understanding.

38. In working with the presidents, we have determined the following roles they can play: (1) represent regions to WCC globally and represent the WCC to the regions, (2) serve as a conduit for collaboration with regional ecumenical organizations, (3) assist in building unity within the regions, (4) help link regions with other regions, and (5) be connected with the executive committee without necessarily having a seat on the committee. These are some of the creative ways in which we can encourage a stronger role and involvement of the WCC presidents in the regions and beyond to strengthen regional connections, which the WCC needs in order to build on its unity.

39. **Representation** In strengthening the fellowship, we need to continue to encourage the involvement and commitment of member churches in the life, work, and witness of the WCC. In working on the slates for nominations to WCC Commissions, Reference Groups and Advisory Groups, we have ensured that a high percentage of churches that are not represented in the central committee are involved in these respective bodies. However, we are able to work only with names submitted by member churches when requested. It is sad to note that some member churches often do not respond to our request and thereby exclude themselves from being considered for participation in the fellowship. I urge member churches that fall into this category to take these requests to nominate people from their churches to serve in the WCC more seriously. This is necessary to ensure that your church is represented in the work of the WCC.

40. Strengthening the fellowship also impresses upon all member churches the need to help balance the representation of men, women, clergy, laypeople, youth, Indigenous people, and people with

disabilities. I realize that this can be a challenge for some churches but, as much as possible, I like to encourage member churches to take this seriously. The fellowship is strengthened when we realize the calling, gifts, and ministry of all of God's people and not just selected groups of people. While the WCC is getting better at addressing the need for balances, it still does not come without effort and challenges.

41. **Ecumenical Partnerships** The governance leadership, staff, member churches, and ecumenical partners all help us to strengthen the fellowship in a variety of different ways. We are thankful for all that they do to keep the WCC strong, engaged, active, and relevant. We greatly appreciate our ecumenical partners. The WCC work is strengthened when we support the work that other ecumenical partners are doing best and when they support us in what we do best. The need for Christian unity, the recognition of diminishing financial resources, and the response to contemporary global challenges require a spirit of cooperation and collaboration rather than individualism, the quest for self-identity, and competition. God's mission in the world is strengthened by unity, vision, and collaborative engagements.

42. **Assembly Evaluation** To strengthen the fellowship, it is important to note the areas in which we can improve on the things we do. The executive committee in November 2022, requested the general secretary to provide a comprehensive and qualitative evaluation of the last WCC assembly. A separate document offers a detailed evaluation with lessons learnt and suggestions for improvement; it includes lessons learned from the financial perspective as well.

43. **Unity, Mission and Ecumenical Formation** The strategic objective of strengthening the fellowship and deepening solidarity finds expression in the work of Unity, Mission and Ecumenical Formation (UMEF). The team addresses unity from theological, missional, and ecumenical formation perspectives. In the strategic planning process they have identified four strategic priorities gathered around four ideas, namely, (1) Visible unity; (2) Broadening the table; (3) Ecumenical missiology as mission from the margins, and (4) Ecumenical formation as ethos and as programme. These priorities frame its programme work strategy for the period 2023 to 2030, which will be presented in the SP session of the central committee.

44. The WCC's calling to strengthen unity is founded on the understanding of unity as God's gift, which compels us to act against issues that cause disunity. Among other things, the Karlsruhe assembly identified two themes, namely, decolonization and migration, which could inform future work.

45. The current Faith and Order Commission held its final meeting online on 20, 22, 24, and 26 of April. The Commission reflected on and celebrated its work and made recommendations for nominating a moderator, members of the incoming commission, and the Nicaea2025 steering group.

46. The outgoing Commission on World Mission and Evangelism (CWME) Continuity Group met and advocated afresh for all WCC work to reflect the work CWME did around the 2018 Arusha Conference on World Mission and Evangelism. The aim is to give new direction for focus on Mission from the Margins to harness and build on the work of the Ecumenical Disability Advocacy Network (EDAN) and the Ecumenical Indigenous People's Network (EIPN), which are already integrated.

47. The preparatory work for Nicaea2025 has begun, guided by the Concept Paper, *Nicaea 2025: Living the Apostolic Faith Together Today*. The celebration of Nicaea2025 provides a great opportunity for the WCC to encourage visible Christian unity, especially since Christians from both the east and west celebrate a common Easter in 2025. We are in conversation with the Roman Catholic Church, the Orthodox family, and Christians from other church traditions to participate in the Nicaea2025 activities. It is important to note that CWME and Public Witness and Diakonia are also participating in the

planning of the activities of Nicaea2025. In the new Strategic Plan, the methods of working seek to break down silos so that the work on unity is embedded even in the organizational and programmatic and operational structures of the WCC. The current perceived separation of theology and praxis (*diakonia*) is conceived as holistic and integral work in the Strategic Plan.

48. The fellowship is strengthened by deeper and coordinated collaborations with Christian communions that are part of the fellowship. The Ecumenical Theological Education (ETE) programme collaborated with LWF, EMW, and WCR on the 2022 Ghana conference on “Pandemic and Pedagogy” that will lead to a virtual launch of a joint communiqué on the outcomes of the conference in the near future.. Preparatory work for an Ecotheology peer review online project jointly delivered to theological institutions by WCC-ETE and EMW and preparatory work for GETI 2025 alongside Nicaea2025 are underway.

49. The journey toward visible unity expressed through ecumenical education and formation is deeply strengthened by the Ecumenical Institute at Bossey, where 27 students from 19 countries completed their studies in ecumenism and graduated on 27 January 2023, and seven masters 'students just completed their studies on 14 June 2023. The Bossey online course, *Together Towards Unity: Being Church in a Fragmented World 2023* took place from 20 March to 11 June 2023, and the preparatory work for the interfaith course for 23 July to 11 August 2023 is underway.

50. The WCC 11th Assembly gave special attention to the voices of youth who made their presence felt, and rightly so. The inclusion of young people in the life and work of the fellowship is essential for the sustainability of the ecumenical vision and movement. The Stewards Programme at this central committee would include five ecumenical formation sessions and provide orientation for young commissioners. To fulfil the required percentage of youth representation on the central committee, the executive committee approved the participation of 15 youth advisors at this central committee meeting. We are pleased to have their leadership and voice in this meeting.

51. The ecumenical fellowship is also strengthened by collaborations with other religions, and WCC has a credible history of solidarity and work on formation of young people for peace-building and justice in the world. During the period under review, the Interreligious Dialogue and Cooperation (IRDC) transversal has worked jointly and individually to participate in the World Week of Interfaith Harmony on 7 February, host the annual meeting of the WCC and the Dicastery for Interreligious Dialogue (Vatican) from 26-28 April 2023, and participate in the inaugural meeting of Hindu-Christian leaders in Europe on 18 April 2023 in Rome. Solidarity greetings were sent to interfaith partners during the Muslim festival Eid al-Fitr at the end of Ramadan and at the Buddhist Vesak festival. Work on the next issue of *Current Dialogue* is underway.

52. All of the above items indicate some of the work that is being done to strengthen the fellowship and deepen solidarity on a number of levels. We will continue to build on these.

## **2. Witnessing together as transforming disciples**

53. Returning to my focus on Pentecost at the beginning of this report, we are reminded that the Holy Spirit gave the disciples power to be witnesses. Witnessing to the saving love and grace of Jesus Christ is the responsibility of every believer. The account in Acts 4:42ff. tells us what happened to the people when the Holy Spirit came upon them.

54. The passage gives us a clear link between spirituality and service. As they met together, they prayed, worshipped, studied the scriptures, praised God—and it does not stop there. It goes on to say

that they sold their possessions and gave to others as they had need. These believers transformed by Christ and filled with the Holy Spirit went out and transformed society.

55. We give thanks to God for many of our member churches who do such incredible work in diaconal ministries. The love of God moves us to make a difference and to transform the world so that it may reflect the values and ideals of God's kingdom. We rejoice that through our member churches and partners in mission we as the WCC are able to witness together as transforming disciples. We are ourselves being transformed as we are transforming lives – an important lesson learnt from the Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace.

56. **Public Witness and Diakonia** The WCC also engages in specific tasks that enable us to witness together as transformative disciples. These can be seen in all that we do in and through the WCC but more specifically in the work of Public Witness and Diakonia (PWD). The PWD team have identified four strategic priority areas to inform the new Strategic Plan, namely: (a) The living planet, (b) Human rights and access to justice, (c) Peace and reconciliation, and (d) Holistic health and healing. The team also continued implementing already-running projects.

57. **Peacemaking** The WCC witnessing together can be seen in the work we have engaged in since the beginning of this year. The following details outline some of the WCC activities in peacemaking:

- 58. In the conflict in *Ukraine* the WCC leadership is working toward a roundtable, as mentioned earlier.
- 59. In the case of *Sudan*, the WCC has maintained close and continuous communication with our member church and ecumenical partners in that context. On 25 May, the WCC in collaboration with the All Africa Conference of Churches (AACC), the Fellowship of Christian Councils and Churches in the Great Lakes and Horn of Africa (FECCLAHA), and the Sudan Council of Churches (SCC) leadership, convened an online consultation on the situation in Sudan. The meeting received updates from the SCC church leaders and reflected on the ways the ecumenical family can best support the people of Sudan. The WCC is looking for the earliest practicable opportunity to take an ecumenical delegation to the country.
- 60. WCC is also engaged in discreet efforts to promote dialogue with regard to the longstanding and worsening humanitarian and human rights crisis in *West Papua*, and a humanitarian pause in the escalating conflict between Indonesian military forces and indigenous Papuan armed groups. WCC also organized a human rights monitoring and reporting workshop for Papuan counterparts, in Bali in May.
- 61. In response to an invitation for WCC's engagement, we are currently exploring ways in which we can offer support to the roundtable peace process in *Colombia*.
- 62. The WCC's efforts for justice, reconciliation, and peacebuilding in the Middle East are a longstanding and continuous commitment of the ecumenical movement toward the region. The WCC-led interfaith process for revision of the educational curriculum in *Iraq* was concluded successfully through a celebratory "living together" event in March in Baghdad that brought together all religious and ethnic components of the Iraqi society. This follows four years of patient work by the WCC supporting diversity and coexistence in Iraq and promoting inclusive citizenship as a means for just and sustainable peace. This process has now resulted in the Iraqi government establishing a committee to develop a national strategy for managing diversity.
- 63. In the *Holy Land*, challenges and injustices resulting from the occupation of the Palestinian territories continue to create violations of human rights, including freedom of movement and access to places of worship, especially around religious feasts. The 2023 Easter Initiative for Justice and Peace was successfully coordinated by ten churches and ecumenical delegations to the Holy Land. The Heads of Churches of Jerusalem have taken up stronger ownership and greater involvement in the WCC's work in the Holy Land through the Jerusalem Liaison Office Advisory Group.

- 64. Between January and April, we had two teams of about 28 persons each joining the *Ecumenical Accompaniment Programme for Palestine and Israel (EAPPI)*. The situation is increasingly difficult, but the programme continues to provide international protection, accompaniment and advocacy for the local Palestinian communities as means of peaceful resistance.
- 65. In *Syria*, the WCC continued to engage civil society actors, including religious ones, from diverse religious and ethnic backgrounds to work together to increase social cohesion and rebuild the Syrian social fabric and national identity. After facilitating this process that led to the elaboration of 20 “Principles for a Syrian Social Contract,” which are principles for a living together, the WCC is now in the process of evaluating its work in this area, in order to provide for a smooth and sustainable transition to enable the local partners to build a future that values peace, stability, and community ownership.
- 66. *Korea Peace Initiatives* This year marks the 70th anniversary of the 1953 Korean War Armistice Agreement. The National Council of Churches in Korea (NCCCK) has been promoting the Korea Peace Appeal (KPA) campaign for over a year now, drawing global participation and stirring hope and new resolve for a peace treaty to replace the Armistice Agreement. In response to the mandate expressed in the 11th WCC Assembly “Minute on Ending the War and Building Peace on the *Korean Peninsula*,” the WCC is promoting a global prayer campaign to support the Korean churches in their advocacy efforts, particularly through the KPA campaign. As part of this global prayer campaign, and to recognize and celebrate Women’s Month in March, the WCC hosted a documentary screening of “Crossings” at the Ecumenical Centre on 21 March, followed by a panel discussion around the issue of the impact of war and conflict on women and their role in the peacebuilding process. The event was co-hosted by Women Cross the DMZ (WCDMZ), Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF), the Korean Women’ Movement for Peace (KWMP), and the Nobel Women’s Initiative (NWI).
- 67. Against the background of continued security challenges and fragile political environment leading up to the March 2023 general elections in *Nigeria*, WCC programme staff carried out a solidarity and fact-finding visit to Nigeria 15 – 29 February. The staff delegation consulted with the WCC member churches, the Christian Council of Nigeria, the Christian Association of Nigeria, the Ogoni Ministers Forum, the staff of the WCC-supported Interfaith Peacebuilding Centre in Kaduna, and leaders of Islamic community in coping with these ongoing challenges. Furthermore, the WCC in collaboration with the All Africa Conference of Churches (AACC) deployed six international ecumenical election observers during the presidential elections.

68. **Other forms of diakonia** The WCC continues to witness together on *gender justice*. Through the Just Community of Women and Men, WCC continues to be a global player in raising awareness and promoting active participation by member churches, ecumenical partners, and people of goodwill in activities that seek to reduce gender injustice, in various forms. The WCC’s representation at the 67<sup>th</sup> Commission on the Status of Women, in March, continued to strengthen the WCC and its ecumenical and interfaith relationships and networks against gender-based violence and discrimination. The Thursdays in Black campaign has inspired a promising new initiative that was established by young people in Kenya toward transformative masculinities and femininities in colleges.

69. The WCC witnessing together can be seen in the development of a new toolkit for churches on *child safeguarding* that started in Tanzania through the Churches’ Commitments to Children, with the Church of England’s Clewer Initiative. An international version of this new toolkit is planned, for support to all member churches in addressing the risks of child abuse, and building on the WCC Out of the Shadows campaign.

70. The Karlsruhe assembly requested that the WCC raise its witnessing together in addressing *racial, xenophobic and other forms of discrimination, including decolonization*. Much effort is being put into working with member churches and ecumenical partners on this subject. We commend the member

churches who have taken steps to introspect their churches' contributions to historic and ongoing injustices and are currently engaged in reflections around models of atonement and reparatory justice that could help to see the one human family reconciled. Our work on racial justice continues to receive recognition not only from member churches but also from multilateral institutions. We enjoy strong working relationships with various United Nations mechanisms, including the Working Group of Experts on People of African Descent (WGEPAD) and the Permanent Forum on People of African Descent (PFPAD), which has invited us to their sessions in May and June. We have been invited to host side-events that spotlight contributions of faith communities to the search for justice by Africans and People of African Descent.

71. The WCC continues to witnessing together in the *Health and Healing* programme by serving on the boards of the Africa Christian Health Associations Platform (ACHAP), the Ecumenical Pharmaceutical Network (EPN), and Christian Connections for International Health (CCIH). The WCC launched Contextual Bible Studies on Health and Healing and commemorated World Immunization Week during the quarterly meeting of ecumenical global health partners' network. We also received the Swahili translation of the book *Health Promoting Churches: Reflections for Churches on Health and Healing on Commemorative Health Days*. WCC staff attended the World Health Assembly in May, with additional delegates from the Christian Medical Association of India and Bread for the World. The programme continued work on a document to help churches establish and run effective national Christian health associations.

72. The newly reorganized *Ecumenical HIV and AIDS Initiatives and Advocacy* (EHAIA) programme continues to provide technical support to our ecumenical partners on HIV. During the period under review, the closure of the five regional EHAIA offices was concluded while the reorganizing of the HIV program was further advanced. A meeting with WCC partners funding HIV/AIDS work was also held to share information and programme direction. The former advisory groups of EHAIA and the Ecumenical Advocacy Alliance (EAA) were informed about the future work and received appreciation for their years of service. A webinar was also hosted to explore current approaches to fighting HIV stigma. Two missions to Uganda (July) and Nigeria (August) to implement activities on HIV are under preparation. Meanwhile, the health team continued to prepare for the transitioning of the three programmes (EHAIA, EAA, and Health and Healing) into the new Health and Healing Commission.

73. The Karlsruhe Assembly placed the *climate emergency* as a central aspect of its work. This work which also includes economic justice, water, and food justice, is important at a time when the whole world is struggling with hunger and climate-induced droughts and floods. A hybrid meeting convened with interfaith partners in February reflected on the outcomes of the COP27 UN climate change conference and discussed the key tasks for ensuring a successful COP28, which will take place late this year in the challenging context of the United Arab Emirates. The WCC is collaborating with a number of religious organizations and NGOs to prepare for the interfaith contribution to COP28.

74. A webinar marking the one-year anniversary of the climate-responsible finance initiative on 9 May led to a high number of member churches and partners expressing interest in joining climate-responsible banking efforts, as an urgent measure to save children's lives. Awareness raising on climate-related drivers of violence against children was promoted through WCC research published by *The Lancet*, Harvard University, and the Global Partnership to End Violence against Children. A new WCC climate litigation initiative is being explored, to support churches in promoting inter-generational climate justice.

75. The *Ecumenical Water Network* (EWN) and its members participated in the UN Water Conference 2023 in New York and, in partnership with the People's Water Forum, successfully presented a Water Justice Manifesto to the high-level segment of the UN Water Conference, which was signed by over

500 organizations and over 560,000 individuals through *avaaz.org*. The EWN also successfully completed its Lenten campaign, Seven Weeks for Water, by distributing seven biblical reflections in four languages during the Lenten season.

76. In response to the converging food and debt crises, an online consultation of churches was convened by EAA and the *New International Financial and Economic Architecture* (NIFEA) initiative in April, followed by a side-event held during the UN Economic and Social Council Financing for Development Forum in New York.

77. As part of the NIFEA initiative, the call for resource mobilization to support the climate transition and resilience of communities was the focal point of a side-event during the Civil Society Policy Forum of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Bank Spring Meetings in Washington, D.C., in April. The *Zacchaeus Tax Campaign* for global tax justice was relaunched in Johannesburg in May, bringing together church leaders, experts, activists and politicians.

78. WCC capacity building for *Ecumenical Diakonia* continued with a workshop for church leaders in Africa, co-hosted together with the AACC. Additionally, bylaws for the proposed new *Commission on Climate Justice and Sustainable Development* were developed.

79. WCC has continued its engagement with UNHCR and civil society partners for the establishment of a Global Alliance to End *Statelessness*, and serves as a member of the UNHCR-convened taskforce for this purpose.

80. In January, the WCC collaborated with the UN and faith-based partners to convene the 9th Annual Symposium on the Role of Religion and FBOs in International Affairs in January 2023 (in New York and online), under the theme “Securing People’s Wellbeing and Planetary Sustainability.”

81. The above mentioned programmes and activities of PWD is a marvellous indication of how the WCC sets out to fulfil its strategic objective to Witness together as transforming disciples. The new Strategic Plan will shape, sharpen and focus our work in these areas.

### **3. Encouraging spirituality, reflection and formation**

82. Ecumenical work cannot stand detached from spirituality and spiritual formation. Deep spirituality and love for God and God’s world is what prompts our work for transformation and healing in the world. I am pleased to say that the work of the WCC is always saturated with prayer. Our daily online prayers, Monday in-person prayers in the chapel, Week of Prayer for Christian Unity, and prayers offered for various events, anniversaries, and special gatherings are regular features of the WCC life and witness. The in-person prayers on Mondays and online during the rest of the week are done in collaboration with WCC, LWF, and Focolare staff, as well as member churches. The hybrid nature and online prayers have created an opportunity for wider participation of member churches in the daily and special prayers, especially as different countries and regions are prayed for each week in the Ecumenical Prayer Cycle. Prayers accompanying WCC meetings and preparatory work on WCC 75th anniversary prayers continue.

83. Praying together in the Ecumenical Centre constantly reminds us that we are called by God to fulfil God’s mission in the world. Prayer keeps us centred, focused, and encouraged at all times. Given the challenges we face globally, prayer gives us the wisdom, energy, and inspiration to make a difference.

84. A brief section on encouraging spirituality is by no means an indication that little is being done in this area. It simply means that spirituality, reflection, and formation are an integral aspect of everything

we do. The information provided in this report thus far certainly testifies to this fact, not only in the programmes but also in the very actions of the WCC.

#### 4. Fostering innovative and inspiring communication

85. As general secretary, one of the first things I requested the Communications team to do is to **lift the profile of the WCC** worldwide and to capitalize on and sustain the interest shown in the WCC since the last assembly.

86. The WCC 11th Assembly, as well as its lead-up and follow-up, brought a marked increase in both output of communications as well as in the reading and listening audiences across the world. From a website visited more than two million times last year, to more than 94,000 followers and fans on social media, the face—and the stories— of the WCC have been travelling across the globe in many ways.

87. Some of the accomplishments are clear from statistics: 130 assembly-related stories published online, 20,000 website visitors daily during the assembly, 14,000 photos uploaded to the WCC photo gallery, many hours of online streaming, and a continued increase in social media interaction.

88. During the first five months of 2023, 340 news stories have been published on the WCC website and shared with media, subscribers, and the WCC fellowship on social media – on average, 15 stories per week. Among the most widely read news stories monthly this year have been those related to the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity (January), churches' responses to the earthquake in Türkiye and Syria (February), the visit of the WCC leadership to the Vatican for a meeting with Pope Francis (March), the visits to Ukraine and Russia (May), the WCC Easter message (April), and the death of the former WCC moderator, Dr Agnes Abuom (May-June).

89. More recently, several news stories related to the crisis in Sudan have been published online and shared with media and the WCC fellowship. In April, the WCC published its Annual Review for 2022, providing insight into the WCC's activities undertaken in 2022 and continuing into 2023.

90. **Key milestones in WCC channels** The World Council of Churches was honoured as a top non-governmental organization for its work during 2021, receiving a third-place Geneva Engage Award on 1 February 2023 for effective and inspiring social media outreach and engagement. The award, presented by the Geneva Internet Platform, DiploFoundation, and Canton de Genève, encourages convergences around development, human rights, digital and other policy issues between communities worldwide and International Geneva, which is host of many international negotiations with an impact across countries and continents. We express our congratulations to the team and are so glad that their work is being recognized even outside the WCC.

91. Throughout this period, the WCC's various social media channels amassed a total of 94,261 fans and followers, with 1,753 new additions. The social media posts reached more than 700,000 individuals, with more than 40,000 engagements. In the media, there were 3,901 mentions related to these events. Peak coverage occurred on 6 February, with 402 mentions in connection with Patriarch Kirill, and on 6 March, with 408 mentions regarding the nomination of Rev. Dr Karen Georgia Thompson, a member of the WCC executive committee, as the general minister and president of the United Church of Christ in the US, as well announcement of the death of former WCC moderator Dr Agnes Abuom on 31 May.

92. During the first part of the year, an estimated 9,000 articles were downloaded from two WCC journals, *The Ecumenical Review* (including *Current Dialogue*) and the *International Review of Mission*.

93. Around 500 people visited the WCC during the past five months, in Geneva, including several groups of young people, groups from member churches, leaders from other religions, seminars, and universities and Brother Alois from the Taizé community with a team of 60 young leaders.

94. The information above is an indication of the good and successful work of the Communications team. We are always trying to keep up with the social media world and to improve. Social media are vital to reach and connect, especially young people, with the ecumenical movement.

## **Finance, Green Village and Bossey**

95. **Financial results 2022** WCC is grateful to all the member churches and ecumenical partners for their generous support in 2022. With solidarity from many, which is deeply appreciated, the assembly results were closed at a break-even, with costs of CHF 11.5 million – and no call on general reserves.

96. With the sale of the Kyoto plot in July 2022, WCC completed the first objective in the Green Village project, with all CHF 24 million loans taken to refinance the pension fund now paid down. The results for the year show a profit of CHF 15 million. In fact, WCC has a profit on the land sale of about CHF 20 million, and losses or decreases in other funds, of nearly CHF 5 million. The land sale profit includes values now held for a very specific purpose and are therefore restricted. General reserves were closed at CHF 7.4 million, above the target of CHF 7 million. We thank God and all our member churches and ecumenical partners for their financial contributions.

97. **Financial situation 2023 and in the four-year cycle** Programme income was budgeted at CHF 14 million for 2023, reduced from CHF 16 million in 2022. Adverse FX rates were the main reason for this income reduction. We therefore began this cycle of work with the sad task of closing out about 12 staff positions in 2022 to sustain the 2023 financial situation. With support from executive committee, budgeted expenditure was approved at CHF 15 million. The WCC does not have an abundance of money, therefore; the plan cannot be to spend beyond our means each year, turning to the reserves. We need to be a little more circumspect about taking decisions that have financial implications without giving them due financial consideration; for example, we appointed additional Commissions at the assembly, though very needed, yet without any financial provisions. This is not going to be sustainable in the future.

98. We have set the level of CHF 14 million for planning for the four-year cycle, knowing that it is not enough for all that we need to do. Our aim is that with the new strategic plan, where priorities and objectives are defined, we will raise more funds for all our areas of focus, but perhaps especially for the churches' work in peacebuilding and for climate justice.

99. **Membership contributions** We reported that 215 member churches paid a membership contribution in 2022. This represents only 61% of our members. If we are serious in our commitment to unity, and to walk together in our pilgrimage, then we must aim for a contribution from all our member churches. We recognize that some member churches are facing serious financial constraints and may struggle to make ends meet and are, thus, unable to sustain their financial commitment to the WCC, but I would like to encourage these churches to inform me about their situation rather than remain silent. I understand that it may be a matter of pride that prevents some member churches from responding, but what is worse is not hearing from them. It gives the impression that these member churches are not committed to the work of the WCC, though this may not be the case. I would like to urge you to be in touch. In the same breath in which we express the wish that all member churches pay their contributions, we would definitely not want any member church to be disadvantaged in any way because of economic reasons. It must be understood that economic contribution is not the only gift members bring to the WCC. We bring a variety of other gifts in spiritual encounters, sharing of life

stories and faith experiences, richness shared in exploring and understanding the scriptures from diverse backgrounds, and so much more. I would also urge member churches that are able to make their contributions to do so in a timely manner. We express our sincere thanks to member churches and partners who give over and above their expected financial contributions. Thank you so much!

100. **On Green Village** The sale of land does not mean that the WCC is ready to launch into construction of the Lima building, or the Ecumenical Centre renovation, immediately. We can be pleased to have completed the first phase of the project. However, we will need more land sales or income before we can sign a contract committing WCC to construction costs. The steering committee is looking into that closely, also in awareness of the costs to be covered while WCC is a tenant in the Kyoto building, if the sales process takes longer. An approach is to be made to Geneva foundations for the renovation of the Ecumenical Centre.

101. **Move to Kyoto** As a condition of the sale of Kyoto, the WCC rented nearly three floors in the Kyoto building, for three years. Funds from the land sale are required in part to cover the rental costs. The intention was to ensure that sister organizations would have office space, and also that some of our tenants would sublet from us. In particular, for the sister organizations, WCC felt responsible to ensure that space could be made available. In May, we have learned with some sadness that the LWF will prefer to rent elsewhere for three years, and will not join WCC in the Kyoto building, citing issues of affordability, although price had not yet been discussed, as well as concerns about the space layout.

102. However, we note that the LWF intends to commit to work with us on the Lima building in Green Village, where LWF will plan to be in the future. Such a commitment will be well received by the WCC.

103. Certainly, the move to the Kyoto building will be challenging for us all, in different ways. Scheduled for June 2024, we have just one year to go. A dedicated manager will be joining the team soon to lead the transition process over the next year.

104. **Results and prospects at Bossey** In 2022, the hotel and conference centre at the Château de Bossey reported net profits of CHF 175,000, applied in programme work. This exceptional result followed two years in which the hotel was partly closed because of COVID, and staff reduced to the minimum, and it represented a valuable step forward. The manager and the team are warmly congratulated. Now, after years where investment has been kept to a minimum, we begin a study to determine what equipment and renovations are most needed, with a view to using the premises for WCC meetings between 2024-2027, when the Ecumenical Centre is closed for renovation; and also in the hope of developing the income stream from the property. Bossey will be important for our work over the next years, as it always has been, and we are grateful to all our partners and member churches who continue to support the academic work and the Institute as a privileged place for the member churches.

## Concluding remarks

105. I am pleased to report that in spite of the situation we had at the end of 2022, when we had to reduce at least 12 members of staff, so far in 2023 we have managed to retain all staff, extending contracts where necessary. We hope and pray that the financial situation will continue to improve, to ensure stability and sustainability.

106. I am pleased to report that with the appointment of senior leadership in all the vacant posts the WCC, from a staffing point of view, is very stable. However, we have not appointed a deputy general secretary as yet because of the financial situation and the transitions in senior leadership last year. We plan to appoint a deputy general secretary in 2024 after the approval of the Strategic Plan in this central

committee and a possible restructuring process to align with and implement the plan. The next six months will enable us to focus on the function, role and skills needed for the post of deputy general secretary in line with the changes taking place in the organization. This appointment would need also to take into serious consideration the need for balances and the gaps in representation of member churches, gender and regions in senior leadership among WCC staff. This matter to appoint a deputy general secretary in 2024 was discussed and approved by the executive committee.

107. In concluding, my report has attempted to focus on setting the scene for the new Strategic Plan, provide some details of future directions with programmatic work, and share what we have done in the past six months especially in the programme areas. Hopefully, all of these have given an indication of where we are going as the WCC into the future. I would like to end with the vision statement I offered at my election for the WCC. I envision:

108. A united, flourishing, sustainable, contextually, and globally relevant WCC, praying, worshiping, witnessing, and working together to impact and transform the world with Christ's love, justice, peace, reconciliation, and unity, participating in God's reign on earth and the fullness of life for all creation.

109. **Acknowledgments** I am grateful to the Leadership of the Central Committee (LCC) for their encouragement, support, and wisdom. We meet on a regular basis and work together on matters pertaining to the WCC. At times, we are able to travel together and represent the WCC in needed places. I have enjoyed working with the WCC moderator and sharing public platforms with him. Recently we delivered a dialogue Bible study at the Kirchentag in Germany on the theme, "Now Is the Time" based on Luke 17:20-25 on the Kingdom of God.

110. I would like to place on record my appreciation for my dream team - the staff who go about their work with such fruitful labour and dedication. The SLG is a pleasure to work with, and I am looking forward to our continued work together into the future of the WCC. I am deeply overjoyed and encouraged by the commitment and dedication of the WCC staff. I look forward to working with the team on implementation of the new Strategic Plan as soon as we recover from the preparations for this central committee.

111. We express our sincere gratitude and appreciation to the following who have left or will be leaving the WCC office during the period January to June 2023: Rev. Kyeong-Ha Woo, Rev- Dr Abraham Silo Wilar, Ms Joy Eva Bohol Algodon, Rev. Dr Jin Yang Kim, Rev. Matthew Ross, Dr Mohamad Khir Alwazir, Mr Damien Vercauteren, Mr Shehzad Ahmed. We wish them God's continued blessings and best wishes for the future whether it is in retirement or other employment.

112. We are glad to welcome the following new staff who joined us between January and June this year: Dr Andrej Jeftic, Director of Faith and Order; Ms Mariana Vintoniv, Finance Manager; Mrs Dinah Mombo, Project Assistant for EDAN in Kenya.

113. We pray that they will have a fruitful and blessed time of service in the Council.

114. I would like to express my thanks and gratitude to all our member churches, ecumenical partners, and organizations for their support, contributions, and faithful commitment to the WCC. This commitment will lead us further, beyond these 75 years, as we seek to continue our Pilgrimage of Justice, Reconciliation, and Unity. May we continue to tarry in the presence of the Holy Spirit and the love of Christ!