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Original

Report of the Programme Committee revised

The programme committee of the central committee, under the leadership of Rev. Karin van den Broeke, and Rev. Lilian W. Karinga and Rev. Prof. Dr Fernando Enns serving as rapporteurs (checked by Rev. Dr Karen Georgia Thompson),

received and **discussed** the following documents:

- Proposed Agenda of the Programme Committee (PRO 01)
- Moderator's Address (Doc. 02);
- Report of the General Secretary (Doc. 03);
- Follow-up on Recommendations of the Assembly Programme Guidelines Committee (PRO 02)
- WCC Strategic Plan 2023-2030 (PRO 03)
- Report on the Ecumenical Conversations at the WCC 11th Assembly Karlsruhe, Germany 2022 (PRO 04)
- Pre-Assembly Messages (PRO 05)
- Reference Groups Terms of Reference (PRO 06)

A. Proposed Agenda of the Programme Committee (PRO 01)

The moderator of the programme committee reminded the committee of its mandate and presented the agenda. The agenda was approved.

B. Moderator's Address (Doc. 02)

The programme committee discussed the Moderator's Address to identify issues related to the programmatic work of the WCC. The following topics were reaffirmed and highlighted:

- The current situation of multiple global crises;
- The urgency to establish the Commission of the Churches on Climate Justice and Sustainable Development;
- The necessity of the churches to be visibly engaged in the political arena;
- The responsibility to get involved like the Good Samaritan to minister to the wounded;
- The need to analyse the root causes of humanitarian needs that WCC wishes to address;
- The situation in Democratic Republic of Congo should be added to the list of countries of concerns.
- The necessity to secure enough financial resources to meet the many needs the WCC should be addressing along with member churches. This might also include interrogating the architecture of the global financial systems of our time taking note of the economic inequalities.

Recommendation: *The programme committee recommends that*

*1. the central committee **receives** the Moderator's Address with appreciation – and thank the moderator and the leadership team for all the work done.*

Approved by consensus

C. Report of the General Secretary (Doc. 03)

The programme committee discussed the Report of the General Secretary to identify additional issues related to the programmatic work of the WCC.

Appreciation was expressed for the impressive engagement of the general secretary during his first months of office. It should be kept in mind, which additional tasks are referred to the general secretary, and which tasks are to be dealt with by the governing bodies.

Whenever the general secretary visits member churches, some suggestions for follow-up should be provided to churches in the region.

Youth involvement is minimal. Pursuing the goal of 25% youth participation in every aspect and every level of the council (as recommended by the Youth Pre-Assembly), the initiative to have additional youth advisors present in the central committee is appreciated. Yet, acquiring visas was not possible for many, a situation which was also due to the late invitation to this central committee meeting. Consideration should be given to having meetings in regions where entry requirements are more accessible for all – including youth. Youth representation is very much needed in all the commissions and groups.

More visibility should be given to the work on Israel/Palestine, including EAPPI (Ecumenical Accompaniment Programme in Palestine and Israel).

On the war in Ukraine, the initiative of a roundtable was appreciated. In addition, WCC should

- pay attention to the diversity of churches in Ukraine and in Russia, and seek ways to get them involved in the dialogue (taking into account the work of the WCC Faith & Order Commission on facilitating dialogue to build *koinonia*). The WCC should not limit the space for invitation to delegates of the orthodox churches;
- involve women and youth in the dialogue process; and
- advocate for peace in Ukraine and other violent conflicts, discouraging the proliferation of weapons.

Member churches should be encouraged to provide advocacy for just peace in regard to their government's involvement in situations of violent conflict.

Some programmatic work of the WCC could be more de-centralized which would also increase the visibility of the WCC in the regions. Additionally, pilgrim team visits to and within the regions should be organized. During the Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace, it has proven to be an effective model to get more people participating in this WCC initiative. A subsidiary approach – and not a “presidential” one – is to be followed.

A theology and model of companionship needs to be developed further, especially for contexts of conflict, e.g. the peace process in Colombia, for conflict prevention, intervention, and transformation.

The central committee should celebrate the work done by partners that contributed to awards received by the WCC and not just acknowledge the awards received as given only to the WCC for its work, for example.

Facing shrinking financial resources while the ecumenical agenda seems to be growing at the same time, prioritising programmes is necessary. In addition, an intersectional approach is highly recommended.

A need was expressed to outline the financial implication of reviewing the role of regional WCC presidents.

When WCC property is sold (within the Green Village project), it could be considered to share part of the profit with indigenous communities around the world (first nations on the lands).

The current status of the WCC on the global stage needs to be critically examined given the number of people who could not get visas to the central committee meeting despite having been officially invited by the WCC.

Recommendation: *The programme committee recommends that the central committee 2. receive the Report of the General Secretary with appreciation – and thanks the general secretary and staff for all the work done.*

Approved by consensus

D. WCC Strategic Plan 2023-2030 (PRO 03)

The programme committee discussed the Strategic Plan twice and felt that the introduction and explanations provided by the general secretary during the plenary session of the central committee were very helpful – and should have been provided before the discussions in the programme committee. Use of terminologies in the space are challenging especially for new members of the programme committee, there is an on-going need for reminders to explain use of ecumenical terms, acronyms and abbreviations.

Questions were raised about the interrelation of programmes, e.g. between interreligious dialogue and peacebuilding and reconciliation. Intersectionality in terms of content and methodology should be adopted.

The following challenges were highlighted:

The document seems to be a mixture of strategy and work plan. This makes it difficult to understand, and leads to some perplexity. The overall vision is not clear.

Here, the **Pilgrimage of Justice, Reconciliation and Unity** could be very helpful to serve as a programmatic umbrella, including the theology of companionship, as developed during the former pilgrimage of justice and peace. Some member churches have adopted this approach already, others are just beginning to receive this idea of a spiritual journey which can be taken together. This would also provide visibility to the spiritual dimension of our programmatic work around justice, reconciliation and unity. Yet, continuity and discontinuity should be carefully balanced.

A discussion was held on the common understanding of **unity**, in which it became clear that the focus for the WCC is on the unity of the church as a sign of God's reconciling of all human kind and all of creation. Yet, different ideas were exchanged, when to invite people of other faiths to become part of the companionship, especially in multi-religious contexts.

An integral part of the journey toward reconciliation, we strengthen our commitment to promoting freedom of religion or belief for people of all faiths and none, responding to Christ's love for all, also in the face of persecution.

The common understanding of **ecumenical diakonia** provides more coherence to the programmatic work. In addition, trust and relations are being built between church and society by diaconal engagement.

Another suggestion was to consider the proclamation of the gospel in all programmatic work as a key undertaking.

Concern was raised that the **transversals** could get excluded from the programmatic work, if they are not explicitly included. The strategic plan could be more specific on the methodologies to be used and the evaluation process expected.

Gender discrimination should be considered in the work on racism and discrimination. Again, an intersectional approach seems advisable.

The programme committee notes that the WCC assembly recommendation to make disability a transversal has been a topic during the strategic planning. The Ecumenical Disability Advocacy Network (**EDAN**) has affirmed its location in the Commission for World Mission and Evangelism (CWME) with demonstrated integration of disability into WCC work since the 10th Assembly. The 2023-2030 strategic plan centring 'mission from the margins' is an avenue for disability to inform common witness.

More **youth** engagement and youth empowerment need to be secured for participation in leadership and programming, including youth representation in the Green Village project.

Discussion acknowledged that the conversation about **human sexuality** remains challenging in the ecumenical movement and in the WCC. Continued and careful discussion on controversial ethical matters was recommended by the special commission which gave birth to the permanent committee on consensus and collaboration.

The programme guidelines committee report, adopted by the assembly says: "The assembly requests the central committee that the work of the reference group on human sexuality be continued, especially to facilitate the conversations regarding Conversations on the Pilgrim Way: Invitation to Journey Together on Matters of Human Sexuality with member churches and ecumenical partners who are open to dialogue on this matter."

Some delegates of churches and advisors from specialized ministries and ecumenical organizations expressed that the discussions need to continue, especially when human rights have been set back for many minoritized groups during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The programme committee suggests to consider the establishment of a reference group on human sexuality – in light of the controversial debate within the central committee.

Programmatic work on "**Just Community of Women and Men**" should carefully revisit the use of language when speaking of "the most affected and vulnerable groups, particularly women and children...", since this could reduce the image of women to being only victims without agency. To reach a just community we need the involvement of all people.

Questions were raised on the possible synchronization of **implementing** the programmatic work in Geneva (by WCC staff) and implementation in the regional and local contexts. The programme committee invites WCC staff to reach out to the expertise of local and regional entities (churches, communities, universities, etc.). In addition, attention should be given to processes of **reception**.

Active engagement of the **regional ecumenical bodies**, and WCC presidents, should be sought for, e.g. in ecumenical formation activities. On the other hand, questions were raised on the possibility of

accompaniment of churches in challenging situations (like the upcoming elections in Madagascar, where churches are invited to monitor). Here, capacity building is asked for.

Questions were raised on the design and implementation of the **evaluation** process. What are verifiable indicators for suggested outcomes and programmatic success.

Recommendations: *The programme committee recommends that the central committee*

3. approve the WCC Strategic Plan 2023-2030 as a guide for implementing and monitoring the work of the WCC until the next assembly, with a mid-term evaluation in 2027 to review progress.

Approved by consensus

4. ask the general secretary to **further develop** objectives and indicators for 2023-2026 from the overall framework, to be reviewed by the executive committee in November 2023.

Approved by consensus

5. ask the executive committee to **monitor** the implementation of the strategic plan 2023-2026, and to **report** to the central committee in 2025, before the mid-term review in 2026.

Approved by consensus

6. ask the general secretary to **develop** a concept note towards a common understanding of the Pilgrimage of Justice, Reconciliation and Unity in order to provide coherence to the programmes of the WCC, making use of the theology of companionship, to be presented to and adopted by the next executive committee meeting.

Approved by consensus

7. encourage member churches and partners of the WCC to support and maintain the vital work of WCC programmes in Israel/Palestine as part of the continued Pilgrimage of Justice, Reconciliation, and Unity.

Approved by consensus

8. ask the general secretary to **provide** safe spaces for ecumenical learning and conversations on contested issues

Approved by consensus
10. approve the recommendation from the 11th assembly to add disability ministries as a transversal, within the WCC Strategic Plan while the programmatic work of EDAN remains domiciled within CWME-Mission from the Margins.

Approved by consensus

11. include youth representation in the steering committee of the Green Village project.

Approved by consensus

E. Ecumenical Conversation Reports (PRO 04)

The programme committee was reminded that this resource is reflecting the many discourses undertaken during the assembly. One goal is to translate the reports of the ecumenical conversations into programmatic work. Here, special attention should be given to affirmations provided in the reports. It was suggested that every committee, reference group, or advisory group should review these reports at the start of their work. It would be very helpful if some members of ecumenical conversations become members of future reference groups and advisory groups.

Sharing the booklet widely with the member churches is important to the body.

Some additional explanations were provided on the common understanding on **Mission from the Margins** – as developed during the pre-assembly period. This understanding of doing missiology provides orientation in many, if not all programmatic work of the WCC, since it refers to the intersectionality of injustices.

Here, migration needs to be highlighted specifically. There's need to deal with systemic anti-migration forces.

Programme committee was reminded that the Commission on Faith & Order developed helpful tools on how controversial conversations can be held within our fellowship ("**Moral Discernment**"). This might even be helpful for the envisioned roundtable discussion on the war in Ukraine.

The importance of **intersectionality of race, gender, class** was reaffirmed again. This needs to be reflected theologically and ecumenically in all future programmes. Here, the executive committee on theological education (EC 19) is very informative and inspiring, including the wisdom from PAWEEN (Pan-African Women's Ecumenical Empowerment Network).

Recommendations: *The programme committee recommends that the central committee*
12. **receive** the Ecumenical Conversation Report booklet and Pre-Assembly Messages as resources for the implementation of WCC programme during the 2023-2030 strategic period.
Approved by consensus

13. **ask** the general secretary to **send** the Ecumenical Conversation Report booklet to all member churches and ecumenical partners as resources to guide common action on the pilgrimage of justice, reconciliation and unity.
Approved by consensus

14. **ask** the general secretary to ensure that every reference group and advisory group **studies** the Ecumenical Conversation Report booklet at the beginning of their work.
Approved by consensus

F. Pre-Assembly Messages (PRO 05)

Recommendation: *The programme committee recommends that the central committee*
15. **ask** the general secretary to **send** the Pre-Assembly Messages to all member churches and ecumenical partners as resources to guide common action on the pilgrimage of justice, reconciliation and unity.
Approved by consensus

G. Terms of Reference for Reference Groups (PRO 06)

In order to provide interconnection and collaboration between the different reference groups, an intersectional approach was strongly suggested. Could there be overlap in the membership of reference groups?

The programme committee was reminded that the general secretary can initiate new advisory groups at any point in response to new challenges that might arise on the way, needing a programmatic response.

G.1. Pilgrimage of Justice, Reconciliation and Unity Reference Group

In the composition of this reference group, the programme committee felt it is a good practice to assure representation of commissions in order to secure coherence. On membership, one clarification should be made to secure at least one representative from Christian world communions and one from specialized ministries.

A diaconal approach helps to get member churches involved.

Recommendation: *The programme committee recommends that the central committee*

15. **clarify** the membership composition as follows: “at least 4 representatives from ecumenical partners (e.g., ~~2~~ at least one from the Christian world communions and ~~2~~ one from specialized ministries) ...”;

Approved by consensus

16. **approve** the terms of reference for the reference group on the Pilgrimage of Justice, Reconciliation and Unity;

Approved by consensus

17. **ask** the general secretary to develop a slate of proposed membership for action by the executive committee in November 2023;

Approved by consensus

18. **delegate** to the executive committee the election of the members of this reference group.

Approved by consensus

G.2. Gender Justice Reference Group

In regards to Thursdays in Black, it should be noted that this campaign is concerned about all genders. The inclusion of all should be explicit.

Recommendations: *The programme committee recommends the central committee*

19. **approve** the terms of reference for the reference group on Gender Justice;

Approved by consensus

20. **ask** the general secretary to develop a slate of proposed membership for action by the executive committee in November 2023;

Approved by consensus

21. **delegate** to the executive committee the election of the members of this reference group.

Approved by consensus

G.3. Overcoming Racism Reference Group

Recommendations: *The programme committee recommends the central committee*

22. **approve** the terms of reference for the reference group on Overcoming Racism;

23. **ask** the general secretary to develop a slate of proposed membership for action by the executive committee in November 2023;

24. **delegate** to the executive committee the election of the members of this reference groups.

Approved by consensus 22-24

G.4. Ecumenical Diakonia Reference Group

Recommendation: *The programme committee recommends the central committee*

25. **approve** the terms of reference for the reference group on Ecumenical Diakonia;

26. **ask** the general secretary to develop a slate of proposed membership for action by the executive committee in November 2023;

27. **delegate** to the executive committee the election of the members of this reference groups.

Approved by consensus 25-27

H. Joint Meeting of the Leadership of the Finance Committee and the Programme Committee

The moderators, rapporteurs and invited staff of the programme and finance committees discussed concerns at the intersection of the two committees, including the challenges of prioritizing areas of focus, funding opportunities and systems, and the need for methodological creativity in the programmes. The joint meeting surfaced ideas for consideration by the central committee:

- 1) systemically incorporate the language and methodology of theology of companionship throughout the strategic plan and implementation plans;
- 2) recognize the practical difficulties of executing the amount of programming proposed in the strategic plan with a budget of CHF 14.1 million and agree to prioritize the pursuit of additional funding with staffing structure and work plans;
- 3) develop four year action plans (within the 8 year cycle);
- 4) emphasize the current practice of creating joint programmes with partners from the ground up, and determine 3-5 such projects to use as test cases in the development of joint memorandums of understanding, funding explorations, programme administration and reporting; and,
- 5) given limited financial resources and other factors, consideration should be given to a consultative process for review of the roles of the different regional ecumenical organisations, national councils of churches and other ecumenical bodies, in the spirit of the Common Understanding and Vision (CUV) to develop the common strategy for future multilateral ecumenical work.

I. Joint Meeting of the Leaderships of the Communications Committee and the Programme Committee

At the joint meeting of the leadership of the two committees, the following items were discussed:

- The WCC Strategic Plan 2023-2030 and the importance of strong communication to raise the profile of the WCC and its programmatic work. The communications committee underlined the need for short-and long-term planning in close collaboration with WCC communication department;
- The proposed WCC communication strategy focussing on fellowship communication, prophetic communication, and advocacy communication;
- The new pilgrimage and methodologies with a special focus on pilgrimage communication and the theology of companionship through storytelling and inviting local voices; and
- How to strengthen the role of the WCC, reach out to the fellowship, and strengthen the engagement and the use of the resources produced by the WCC.

Full report RECEIVED by consensus