



World Council of Churches

General Secretariat

150 route de Ferney, PO Box 2100
CH-1211 Geneva 2, Switzerland
Phone: +41 22 791 6111 Fax: +41 22 791 0361
Email: infowcc@wcc-coe.org www.oikoumene.org

Direct phone: +41 22 791 6285
Direct e-mail: Beth.Godfrey@wcc-coe.org

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Sisters and brothers,

I greet you all as you gather today in Washington, DC to commemorate and celebrate the 60th anniversary of the March on Washington, DC for Jobs and Freedom. I salute our forbearers, who on 28 August 1963 marched for equality, equity, inclusion and justice encapsulated in the two words “jobs and freedom.” Today we see far because we stand on the shoulders of the giants of 1963.

This anniversary and commemoration is to celebrate these giants but also to bemoan that a lot remains unchanged hence, the march has not ended. The march must continue. I speak to you, sisters and brothers, at a time when the World Council of Churches is observing a year after its 11th Assembly held in Karlsruhe, Germany in 2022. This assembly was held at a time when the world was emerging from the debilitating COVID-19 pandemic and under the shadows of the war in Ukraine and many other conflicts around the world. The assembly identified climate injustice, conflict, war, and multiple manifestations of inequalities as the major challenges our world faces today. Racism was also identified as a continuing threat to the unity of humankind and undergirding these challenges.

The assembly *Unity Statement* stated, “We – the fellowship of the WCC – live and witness in a world which is at the same time God’s beautiful creation and broken by ecological crisis, war, pandemic, systemic poverty, racism, gender-based violence, human rights violations, and many other sufferings.” It continues by noting: “We are facing many sins of profound injustice, such as casteism, racism, sexism, ageism, ableism, colonialism, economic exploitation, the unequal distribution of power and resources, and the corruption of our relationships with creation, alongside so many kinds of alienation.” In light of these observations, the assembly *Message* emphatically proclaimed:

“We long for a wider movement, the reconciliation and unity of all humanity, and indeed of the entire cosmos. This would be a unity in which God establishes justice, an equal place for all, through which creation may be renewed and strengthened. We rely on Christ’s love as we act and advocate for climate justice. We join our voices with the Amsterdam assembly (1948) that “war is contrary to the will of God,” and the Nairobi assembly (1975) that “racism is a sin against God.” We lament that we have to repeat these statements.”

These words of the assembly, sisters and brothers, remind us of the words of 1963 March on Washington. One of the leading figures of the March, A. Philip Randolph addressing a quarter million people said, “We here today are only the first wave. When we leave, it will be to carry the civil rights revolution home with us into every nook and cranny of the land, and we shall return again and again to Washington in ever growing numbers until total freedom is ours.” As we gather

today, we are not the first wave. I exhort you, sisters and brothers, to make sure that we are not the last wave. Whereas Randolph thought of nationalizing the demand for equality, equity, inclusion and justice, I want to say today, the March must be globalized. The demands must be taken to every nook and cranny of the earth!

In 1963, Rev. Dr Martin Luther King Jr spoke of his dream, he proclaimed that in spite of the difficulties of today and tomorrow, the bells of freedom will toll from one end of the country to the other. "That when this happens...we will be able to speed up that day when all God's children, Black men and white men, Jews and Gentiles, Protestants and Catholics, will be able to join hands and sing in the words of the old Black spiritual, 'Free at last! Free at last! Thank God Almighty, we are free at last!'"

To conclude, sisters and brothers, let me applaud the giants of the past for their resoluteness in recognizing the errors of their time and refusing to submit to error. Their resoluteness challenges us to discern the signs of our times and to make a commitment at this 60th anniversary that the WCC took at its 11th Assembly, as stated in the *Unity Statement*:

"Let us pray that we will never seek to divide or conquer, to exploit or humiliate, to overwhelm by violence or enforce unity; nor to collude any more with the inequalities of the world. Let us not be tempted by politics that is shaped by deepened individualism, dangerous nationalism or increasing militarism; or accept as inevitable the systemic inequalities that divide the world; or suffer without resistance the dominance and dangers of consumerism and of those technologies that alienate us from one another or that damage our God-given humanity. Out of love, we commit ourselves to build a world for the common good, for all humankind. We long for the kind of communion that celebrates and affirms the dignity of all people and honours the whole living earth as the work of God the Creator."

The sins of the past are not ended, they have diversified their manifestation – inequalities have increased, systemic racial discrimination continues unabated, the climate crises is disproportionately impacting racialized communities, access to health and the embedded racism in health were exposed for all to see during the COVID-19 pandemic – are spreading the world over. Therefore, the march on Washington, DC, with that city also acting as a symbol of hegemonic institutional spaces the world over, cannot end; rather we should match the sins in intensity, sophistication and commitment.

Yours in Christ,

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

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