World Council of Churches Ecumenical Conference – 140th Anniversary of the Berlin Conference 1884-1885

17 – 21 May 2025, Berlin, Germany

Berlin 1884-1885 and Anti-Black Racism: In search of a shared Anti-Racist Ecumenical Vision

Draft Annotated Agenda

Introduction

While "Black people" have lived in Europe for centuries, maybe even more than a millennium, Afrophobia and anti-black racism are relatively much younger in origin. European Christianity has been identified as having been complicit in the development of racism, it is also true that the intensification of racist thinking coincided with the emergence of secular science, which challenged and rejected the biblical insistence on the "one human family." The Berlin Conference 1884-1885 was legitimated by an already existing "anti-black racism" in science and philosophy and the Papal Bulls of the 15th century, which simultaneously endorsed and condemned certain aspects of enslavement. Despite the progress made already, anti-black racism persists, and Africans, People of African Descent, and "Black" people in general, remain among the most racially discriminated globally. The ecumenical movement, in its modern form, emerged in response to these injustices and has stood in solidarity with Africans and People of African Descent. 140 years after Berlin, 100 years after Life and Work can the churches and the ecumenical movement re-envision an intentional anti-racism ecumenical vision in deep solidarity with Africans, People of African Descent and Black people in general? Can the ecumenical movement instigate an unscrambling of Africa and Africans who were scrambled by enslavement and colonization?

Objectives and Goals of the Conference

The conference will seek to:

1. ***Re-member*** the Berlin Conference 1884-1885 (colonization and enslavement) and its direct and indirect interface with mission, ecumenism, and anti-black racism.
2. ***Re-appraise*** the legacies of the Berlin conference (coloniality) in entrenching contemporary manifestations of anti-black racism globally.
3. ***Re-imagine*** collectively of ecumenism and ecumenical partnerships through decolonial and deep solidarity lenses

Expected Outcomes

1. A framework for constructing a "deep solidarity" that creates an anti-racism ecumenism.
2. A framework for an "Anti-Racist Ecumenical Action Plan for Decolonization and Reparations."

Time	17 May 2025	18 May 2025	19 May 2025	20 May 2025	21 May 2025
07:00 – 08:30	**Breakfast**	**Breakfast**	**Breakfast**	**Breakfast**	**Breakfast**
08:30 – 09:00	**ARRIVALS**	**Opening Prayer – Rev. Dr. Mikie Roberts (5 mins)** **Pastoral Team & Code of Conduct (10 mins)**	**Morning Devotion**	**Morning Devotion**	**DEPARTURES**
09:00 – 10:30		Opening Session & Welcome Remarks – ACK, EKD, BftW, EMW, WCC (0845-10:00)	**Keynote Address 2** **Plenary** – "The State of racism and anti-black racism in the world today" **Ms Adele Halliday**	**Parallel Sessions – Re-imagining the future** Stream 1.4: Berlin conference and anti-black racism stream Stream 2.4: Mission, Theology and anti-black racism stream Stream 3.4: Decolonization and Reparatory/ive Justice	
10:30 – 11:00		**TEA / COFFEE BREAK (1000-1030)**	**TEA / COFFEE BREAK**	**TEA / COFFEE BREAK**	
11:00 – 12:30		Decolonizing Berlin – Pilgrimage Encounters (1030-1300) ***Packed Lunch on the Bus***	**Parallel Sessions – Re-appraising the present** Stream 1.2: Berlin conference and anti-black racism stream Stream 2.2: Mission, Theology and anti-black racism stream Stream 3.2: Decolonization and Reparatory/ive Justice	**Parallel Sessions – Re-imagining the future** Stream 1.5: Berlin conference and anti-black racism stream Stream 2.5: Mission, Theology and anti-black racism stream Stream 3.5: Decolonization and Reparatory/ive Justice	
12:30 – 14:30		**Opening Worship – Chapel of Reconciliation, Berlin (1300-1345)**	**LUNCH**	**LUNCH**	
14:30 – 16:00	**ARRIVALS**	**Keynote Address 1a** **Plenary** – **"**Colonial Dynamics and the Impoverishment of Africa 140 Years after the Berlin Conference**"** **Prof. Hulisani Ramantswana** **Keynote Address 1b** "The Global Persistence of Anti-Black Racism and the role of the Church" **Honorable Yvonne Apiyo Brändle-Amolo**	**Keynote Address 3** **Plenary** – "Unite and Conquer in order to Divide and Conquer: Religion, Race, and Class, and the Urgency of Solidarity" **Prof Joerg Rieger**	**Parallel Sessions – consolidating responses and recommendations, plans of action** Stream 1.6: Berlin conference and anti-black racism stream Stream 2.6: Mission, Theology and anti-black racism stream Stream 3.6: Decolonization and Reparatory/ive Justice	**DEPARTURES**
16:00 – 16:30		**TEA / COFFEE BREAK**	**TEA / COFFEE BREAK**	**TEA / COFFEE BREAK**	
16:30 – 18:00		**Parallel Sessions – Re-membering the Past** Stream 1.1: Berlin conference and anti-black racism stream Stream 2.1: Mission, Theology and anti-black racism stream Stream 3.1: Decolonization and Reparatory/ive Justice	**Parallel Sessions – Re-appraising the present** Stream 1.3: Berlin conference and anti-black racism stream Stream 2.3: Mission, Theology and anti-black racism stream Stream 3.3: Decolonization and Reparatory/ive Justice	Plenary – Feedback from parallel sessions (16:30-17:45) Closing Remarks – WCC Moderator (17:45-18:00)	
18:00 – 18:15		Evening Devotion	Evening Devotion	Evening Devotion	
19:00		**DINNER / SUPPER**	**DINNER / SUPPER**	**DINNER / SUPPER**	

Spiritual Life

There will be morning and evening devotions during the three days of conferencing. The devotions will be part of the encounters and will play a significant role in centring prayer, song, and biblical reflection as part of the ecumenical engagements. Devotions will be from 08:30 – 09:00 (morning) (except 18th May, when devotion will be 0830-0930) and 18:00 – 18:15 (evening). A special service will be held at the Chapel of Reconciliation on Sunday 18th May around 13:00 hours to conclude the pilgrimage encounters around Berlin.

Pilgrimage Encounters

There will be pilgrimage encounters around Berlin on the 18th May, participants will be taken to different historic sites in Berlin. The sites to be visited will set the context for the engagements throughout the conference. Sites will be visited by bus. Participants will leave hotel Bonhoeffer at 1100 hours and will be back before 1400 hours.

Plenaries

There will be plenaries on the following days and times:

18 May 2025 09:30 – 10:30 will be welcome remarks from the WCC and its local hosting partners of this ecumenical conference, that is, EKD, BftW, and EMW. This might include remarks from the governing authorities in Berlin. 14:30 – 16:00 will be the first keynote address whose major focus would be an exercise of ***re-membering*** the Berlin conference and how a political and economic gathering interfaced with an emerging zeal to evangelize or "conquer" the world for Christ.

19 May 2025 09:30 – 11:00 second Keynote address whose major focus will be a ***re-appraisal*** of the contemporary manifestations of anti-black racism and how the present is a product of the past architecture of racially motivated political and economic exploitation, the outcome of the Berlin conference and the enslavement of Africans. 14:30 – 16:00 third Keynote address whose major focus will be a ***re-imagination*** of ecumenism and ecumenical movement based on "deep solidarity" based on an analysis of racism as part of a complex including class, gender, privilege, and power dynamics among people across ethnic, gender, and privilege lines.

20 May 2025 16:30 – 18:00 during this plenary, the three parallel streams of engagement will report their consolidated observations and proposals for ecumenical anti-racism work, as it interfaces with politics, economic systems and structures, communications, epistemologies, mission, climate, gender, health, and theology. This session will include proposals on the meaning and model of decolonization and reparations/reparative justice.

Parallel Sessions / Streams

There will be three streams of engagements outside of the plenaries. The three streams will follow the three-step approach of ***re-membering the past***, ***re-appraisal of the present***, and ***re-imagination of the future:***

1. **Stream 1: Berlin conference and anti-black racism stream** – this stream will focus on the symbiotic relationship between the Berlin conference 1884 – 1885, interrogating how an emerging anti-black racism in Europe was instrumental in legitimizing the scramble for Africa while the scramble for Africa as decided upon by the Berlin conference was also instrumental in furthering, entrenching and reinforcing anti-black racism. The stream will also focus on the economic consequences of anti-black racism within the context of the enslavement and colonization of Africans. The stream will interrogate how the colonial architecture, coloniality, continues to entrench and reproduce anti-black racism with dire economic consequences for

Africans, People of African Descent and black People globally. Finally, the stream will discuss possible approaches to undoing the continuing impacts of colonization and coloniality, including discussing the appropriateness of decolonization, decoloniality, reparations, reparatory/ive justice within the ecumenical movement. The stream will go on to propose an ecumenical response to this historic situation, a framework for an anti-racism ecumenical vision, and a framework for an ecumenical decolonization and reparations plan of action.

1.1 Short Interventions: Rev. Dr. Guy Hewitt "The Church of England and African Chattel Enslavement: A Journey of Reconciliation" Ms Laquitissa Tseco "The Role of the Church in the Decolonization and Restoration of Mozambique: Past and Present Reflections"

1.1 Questions for engagement: 1. What was the role of emerging "anti-black racism" in European philosophy in legitimizing the conference's motivation? 2. What were the political and economic (and indirectly religious) outcomes of the Berlin conference? 3. In what ways did these outcomes accelerate anti-black racism?

1.2 Short Interventions: Prof. Barbara G. Reynolds "Addressing the Cumulative Impact of Centuries of Religious Autocracy on the Wellbeing of People of African Descent"

1.2 Questions for engagement: 1. In what ways are the legacies of the Berlin conference manifesting in the present lived experiences of Africans, People of African Descent, Black People, and all other racialized communities globally? 2. How is anti-black racism influencing present outcomes in the areas of wealth, health, and climate exposure for "Black people" and racialized people globally? 3. What steps are being taken in the ecumenical movement and beyond to disrupt, dismantle, and undo the impact of anti-black racism (or racism in general)?

1.3 Short Interventions: Rev. Dr. Ruppert Hambira, "Surviving the Herero Genocide: A personal testimony and experiences of the Herero diaspora"

1.3 Questions for engagement: 1. In what ways does racism (anti-black racism) intersect with classicism, gender, and ethnicity? 2. What are the political and economic consequences of separating racial justice from the general class struggles? 3. Are democracy and capitalism abetting anti-black racism or engendering anti-racism globally?

1.4 Questions for engagement: 1. What message can the WCC and the ecumenical movement issue to the member churches and society at large, regarding the continuing impact of the outcomes of the Berlin conference?

1.5 Questions for engagement: 1. What practical actions can the WCC, its member churches, ecumenical partners do to mitigate the continuing impact of the outcomes of the Berlin conference?

1.6 Questions for engagement: 1. What are the next steps to realize the proposed practical actions above?

Stream facilitators: Rev. Philip Vinod Peacock, Rev. Dr. Angelique Walker-Smith, Rev. Nicole Ashwood

2. **Stream 2: Mission, Theology and anti-black racism stream** – this stream will focus on the evolution of Christian missions before and after the Berlin conference, interrogating the uneasy relationship and potential convergencies between the goals of Christian missions and colonial project. The stream will also focus on the consequences of epistemological and theological conquests among the colonized and evangelized communities and how Christian missions and theology provided foundational premises for anti-black racism. In re-appraising the present, this stream

will interrogate contemporary models of mission, theology, ecumenism, and epistemologies. The stream will also interrogate the implications of decolonization, decoloniality, reparations, reparatory/ive justice across the various elements. The stream will consider appropriate responses to both historic and continuing impact of colonization, colonial evangelization, mission, and theology including proposals for mitigating these within the ecumenical movement.

2.1 Short Interventions: Rev. Dr. Fidon Mwombeki "The Berlin Conference: A Landmark in the relationship between colonialism and Mission in Africa."

2.1 Questions for engagement: 1. What were the direct or indirect contributions of western Christian theology and teachings to the development of anti-black racism in Europe that led to the convening of the Berlin conference? 2. How did European Christian missions benefit from the outcomes of the Berlin conference? 3. How did western Christian theology and mission contribute to anti-black racism in the colonies? 4. How did indigenous (and in some instances western missionaries) resistance and agency manifest in the colonies leading to liberation?

2.2 Short Interventions: Mr. Brian Muyunga "How African agency wrestle the faith out of the clutches of colonialism."

2.2 Questions for engagement: 1. Are the legacies of anti-black racism approaches to mission, theology, evangelization continuing within the ecumenical movement and beyond? 2. In what ways is anti-black racism (or racism in general) finding expression in contemporary expressions and models of mission, theology, and evangelization? 3. What steps are being taken in the ecumenical movement to resist, dismantle, and mitigate the impact of anti-black or racism in general?

2.3 Short Interventions: Rev. Hayford Addokwei "Reconfiguring an intrinsic anti-racist ecumenism by de-supremacizing whiteness, de-colonizing Mission, and the missionary mind." Will Postma, "Decolonizing and Localizing development and humanitarian partnerships"

2.3 Questions for engagement: 1. In what ways can mission and theology embrace anti-racism and critical classicism theory to re-imagine future ecumenical relations? 2. In what ways can a mission from the margins begin to dismantle the legacies of the outcomes of the Berlin conference, including anti-black racism? 3. In what ways can the commemorations of Nicaea, Life and Work, and Kairos energize an anti-racist and anti-black racism ecumenical movement?

2.4 Questions for engagement: 1. What message can the WCC and the ecumenical movement issue to the member churches and society at large, regarding the continuing impact of racially prejudiced approaches to mission, theology, and evangelization?

2.5 Questions for engagement: 1. What practical actions can the WCC, its member churches, ecumenical partners do to mitigate the continuing impact of the outcomes of the Berlin conference?

2.6 Questions for engagement: 1. What are the next steps to realize the proposed practical actions above?

Stream Facilitators: Rev. Dr. Michael Blair, Rev. Marvia Lawes, Dr. Andrej Jeftic

3. **Stream 3: Decolonization and Reparatory/ive Justice** – this stream will focus on defining and conceptualizing decolonization, decoloniality, reparations, reparatory mission, reparatory theology, reparatory justice informed by historic episodes of exploitation, such as, the mass enslavement of Africans for economic benefits of capitalist Europe, as well as the colonization and exploitation of Africans and African resources for the economic benefit of Europe and North America. Christian concepts

of reparations will be critically engaged in the quest for a Christian faith undergirding of these concepts for the ecumenical movement.

3.1 Short Interventions: Rev. Dr Gordon Cowans "Enslavement and Colonization: Towards reparations."

3.1 Questions for engagement: 1. In what ways did colonization and the outcomes of the Berlin conference cause harm to Africans, People of African Descent, Indigenous Peoples, Asians, and all other colonized peoples? 2. In what ways did the colonized ancestors resist and exercise agency toward decolonization and reparations?

3.2 Short Interventions: Rev. Dr. Larry Pickens "Addressing Multigenerational Trauma in Framing Reparative Justice." Rev. Dr. Angelique Walker-Smith.

3.2 Questions for engagement: 1. In what ways are the legacies of the Berlin conference being experienced by racialized people and former colonies? 2. In what spheres of life are colonial legacies (coloniality) being experienced globally? In what ways are anti-black (and racism in general) and classicism intersecting in the areas of wealth, health, and conflicts globally? 3. In what ways are churches, ecumenical bodies, and specialized ministries resisting and dismantling coloniality and repairing historic and continuing harms?

3.3 Short Interventions: Rev. Marvia Lawes, Rev. Dr. Rufus Ositelu

3.3 Questions for engagement: 1. In what ways can decolonization engender greater and deeper solidarity in the ecumenical movement? 2. In what ways can reparations/reparatory justice engender deeper solidarity, reconciliation, and unity in the ecumenical movement and wider society? 3. What areas of Christian life are in desperate need for decolonization and reparations?

3.4 Questions for engagement: 1. What are the major principles for understanding decolonization and reparations?

3.5 Questions for engagement: 1. What practical actions can the WCC, its member churches, ecumenical partners do to engender sustainable decolonization and reparatory justice?

3.6 Questions for engagement: 1. What are the next steps to realize the proposed practical actions above?

Stream Facilitators: Prof. Johnathan Jodamus, Ms. Thandi Soko-de Jong, Ms. Abigayle Bolade