World Council of Churches

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Hannover, 11 September 2025

Dear Bishop Kirsten, Dear Bishop Petra, Dear Bishop Frank,
Dear friends and colleagues, Dear members of the global ecumenical fellowship,

Grace and peace to you all in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Today, we gather in a spirit of thanksgiving, reflection, and hope. It is a moment of both heartfelt farewell and joyful new beginnings. We come together to express our deep gratitude for the faithful ministry of Bishop Petra Bosse-Huber, who is retiring after more than a decade of service as the Bishop for Foreign Affairs of the Evangelical Church in Germany (EKD), and to warmly welcome Bishop Frank Kopania as he steps into this important office.

Bishop Petra, today we honour your legacy – one not only of leadership, but of presence. For you have been present where the church, and especially its ecumenical witness, has required courage, diplomacy, and faithful vision.

As a member of the central committee and executive committee of the World Council of Churches (WCC), you have helped to shape the voice and conscience of the ecumenical movement. Your voice, clear and compassionate, has echoed in global forums and quiet consultations alike – advocating for peace, justice, human dignity, and unity in Christ.

You have stood with churches in crisis, supported dialogue between faiths, and nurtured partnerships across borders and cultures. Through several pilgrimages you joined the WCC, advising and guiding us. From Geneva to Johannesburg, Jerusalem to Jakarta, Amman to Uppsala – you have been a bridge-builder, a listener, and a witness to the reconciling love of God in Christ.

And always, you did so with humility, humour, and remarkable calmness – even in the face of complex challenges requiring a clear direction from WCC governing bodies.

The WCC is especially grateful for your role in hosting the WCC 11th Assembly in Karlsruhe in 2022. This was an unforgettable and remarkable moment that you helped to initiate and enable, even through the disruptions and delays of the COVID-19 pandemic.

As we have learnt through you, the EKD foreign affairs office is not simply about diplomacy or representation. It is a deeply theological and pastoral instrument that extends the embrace of the body of Christ to brothers and sisters around the world. It is about weaving the bonds of communion across divides. It is about being attentive to the movement of the Spirit, not only in your own context, but in the cries and joys of the global church. And in this sacred task, Bishop Petra, you have been a faithful steward.

In these times when the church is called to speak prophetically to the world – against injustice, ecological destruction, and growing polarization – your voice has remained rooted in the Gospel and attuned to the suffering and hopes of others.

You have reminded us of the importance of listening. Listening across cultures. Listening across traditions. And above all, listening to God. We are grateful for what you have done and for who you have been among us – a mentor, a colleague, a friend.

As we reflect on your journey, I am reminded of the words from 2 Timothy 4:7: *"I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith."* This verse, so often read at transitions, speaks not only of endurance but of faithfulness to a calling.

You have indeed kept the faith – not as a possession, but as a gift entrusted to you for sharing with others. And now you may carry on in confidence, knowing that the work continues, and that God is not finished with the church – nor with you.

May the next chapter be for you a time of rest, renewal, and unexpected joy. May you continue to witness the seeds you have sown in the lives of others, in the strengthening of churches, and in the deepening of ecumenical trust.

We do not say goodbye – for in Christ, there is no distance great enough to break communion. We say thank you. *Danke*, *Petra*, from the depths of our hearts.

And now, with equal joy, we turn to the installation of your successor, Bishop Frank Kopania. Frank, your appointment as Bishop for Foreign Affairs comes at a crucial moment – for the church, for Europe, and for the worldwide ecumenical movement. We know that you bring not only theological depth, but also political insight, pastoral wisdom, and a faithful heart.

Your background in international relations and your years of service within the EKD and its global partnerships have prepared you well for this new role. We know you to be someone who seeks understanding before offering judgment, who builds trust slowly and surely, and who always asks the deeper question – what is God doing among us?

You now inherit a ministry shaped by your predecessors – one marked by courage, by careful listening, and by the deep conviction that the unity of the church is not optional, but essential to the Gospel.

As you step into this ministry, you do so not alone. You are surrounded by colleagues, friends, and global partners who are eager to walk with you. We trust that the Spirit who has called you will justly equip you – with patience, discernment, and joy.

There is something profoundly beautiful about this moment – the passing of the torch, not in rupture, but in continuity. This is the rhythm of the church. One hand lets go and another takes hold – but it is the same flame that burns.

And so, as Petra lays down this mantle and Frank takes it up, we give thanks for what has been – and we look forward in hope to what will be. Let us never forget that our work in the ecumenical movement is not simply administrative or diplomatic. It is profoundly spiritual. It is about encountering Christ in the stranger, the neighbour, the partner, and

even the critic. It is about holding fast to the radical unity of the body of Christ – a unity that transcends language, ethnicity, ideology, and even doctrine.

In this ministry, success is not measured by numbers or resolutions passed. It is measured by relationships nurtured, bridges built, wounds tended, and Christ revealed.

And so, dear friends, let us commit ourselves once again to this work of peace and reconciliation. Let us support Frank with our prayers and our trust. Let us carry forward Petra's legacy with courage and humility.

Let us pray for the global church – in all its diversity and imperfections – and for its witness to the God of life, who leads us on our pilgrimage of justice, reconciliation, and unity.

Let me end with a word of blessing – one that is both farewell and commission, both thanksgiving and hope:

> May the Lord bless you and keep you.
> May the Lord make His face to shine upon you and be gracious unto you.
> May the Lord lift up His countenance upon you, and give you peace. Amen.

Thank you, Bishop Petra. Welcome, Bishop Frank. And may God's mission continue in and through us all.

Yours in Christ

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