**15 December, 2018**

**Freedom of Religion or Belief in the Middle East**

**Panel**

*Marianne Ejdersten, WCC Communication Director*

The Right to Communicate – the Prophetic Voice

Recognizing and building on communication rights are integral to shaping societies that fully respond to human needs and to improve their economic, political, social and cultural lives.

The right to communicate includes the right to "freedom of opinion and expression" and rights and freedoms "without distinction of … language". The 70th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights is a time to celebrate and reflect on communication as a human right, particularly with respect to Article 19 and its relationship to national and international conventions, declarations, policies and practices.

On 7 November, the World Council of Churches (WCC) Executive Committee approved a Communication Strategy through 2021, the year of the next WCC Assembly.

The WCC is a worldwide fellowship of churches with the capacity, through its members, to mobilize more than half a billion Christians in every community around the world for the pursuit of justice, peace and more equitable societies. The WCC brings together Christians, those of other religious faiths and non-religious communities, to call on government to be accountable to those who are suffering and are excluded from the benefits of a peaceful and just world.

The goal of WCC communications is to raise the profile and impact of the work of the WCC. This is done through a variety of means which reflect the core Christian and ecumenical values of the WCC. Communication is an important strategic tool for the WCC and its member churches and ecumenical partners to sustain influence, gain visibility and promote good causes. Ensuring relevant, credible, transparent and well-coordinated communication

The strategy also reflects how the landscape for communication has changed and therefore requires a stronger prophetic voice.

The WCC must be a catalyst for change – for a world with unity, justice and peace at its heart. Its communication reflects this.

The WCC is to inspire and invite its member churches to work together, actively lending weight to the churches’ common voice. The member churches are the heart of the council.

Communications from the WCC must be inclusive and have participation and hope at their core. Our task is to ignite hope for a better world where human dignity prevails. Human dignity and equality must permeate all communications.

WCC Communications is committed to prophetic communication, that is, to telling the truth (Gen. 20:6, 7), even when it is inconvenient or unwelcome or from voices previously silenced, ignored, powerless or marginalized.

The WCC seeks to lift up and convey the authentic experiences, stories, insights, and values of people and communities within the churches that might otherwise not be heard, even if they are critical of our habitual or accepted practices or challenge principalities and powers.

The WCC is committed to empowering people and groups to speak for themselves and to enabling communication by those who might otherwise not have access to the public sphere.

**One concrete example 12 Faces of Hope - World Council of Churches’ (WCC’s) campaign “Seek#JusticeAndPeace in the Holy Land”**

Half a century has passed since the six-day war when Israel occupied East Jerusalem, the West Bank, the Gaza Strip and the Golan Heights. Despite stalled peace processes and the sufferings entailed by the occupation, people still hope for a better future. Meet 12 people with different backgrounds sharing their hopes for justice and peace in the Holy Land. Help promote [#JusticeAndPeace](http://www.oikoumene.org#JusticeAndPeace Holy Land) by sharing their stories.his section

After 50 years of occupation, Palestinians in the Holy Land haven’t given up their hopes for freedom. Still, Palestinians – and many Israelis as well – hope. They hope that a nonviolent solution to the conflict will come, and that both peoples eventually will live together in peace and reconciliation.

“Hope” was the theme in 2017 of the World Council of Churches’ (WCC’s) campaign “Seek#JusticeAndPeace in the Holy Land” which was launched in June to remind the world about 50 years of occupation and injustice. It is a social media- and WCC web-campaign where 12 people from different backgrounds representing all three religions share their concerns and their prevailing hopes for change. Alongside that, compelling quotes related to the history of the Holy Land, are featured as “50 moments of Justice and Peace”.

We was anxious to maximize the impact of the campaign by a timely coordination of activities and channels. The World Week of Peace in Palestine and Israel organized by the WCC every year, second week of September, offers a good opportunity to revive strong messages and reach out further.

The campaign helped to raise awareness about the ongoing occupation and the sad realities for the Palestinian people.

The messages these 12 people share are really touching and the fact that they come from Christians, Jews and Muslims alike makes it even more compelling. Equally important, from a communications point of view, is the professional design of the campaign and the fabulous photography by Paul Jeffrey.

These qualities will also permeate the exhibition package, which includes framed posters, tapestries, slide shows, folders and other printed material. Everything is scalable to suit different needs and venues.

**One story: The truth will set us free**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2YeHG7WfSRI&list=PLI22eVXX9FYmHQS4xDxmSmYMaCgGypAv3#action=share>

*As the daughter of an Armenian genocide survivor, my first legacy of hope comes from my family. Hope has always been with me. Fifty years is indeed a long time, but not in history. I wake up every morning convinced that we have to be steadfast and follow the will of God for a just cause. My Christian faith propels me, even in bad times. If we claim that we are followers of Jesus Christ, then our discipleship is not easy. But the truth will prevail and set us free in the end.*

*Human beings cannot remain under constant oppression. We are all created in the same image of God. There is something divine in every one of us, and we have no right to destroy that, regardless of opposite positions. No matter how much you suffer, you do not hate. You hope! I believe in justice with compassion and mercy, not revenge.*

*We must work on a human – not political – level, striving for the right and dignity of human beings. My work as a community builder among the oppressed and marginalized has kept my hope alive. Hoping that human beings will remain human.*

*In the Old Testament, forgiveness is included in the Jubilee every seventh year. To forgive and bring back the people who have been rejected. I hope that 2017 can be such a year of justice!*

***Nora Carmi
Civil society worker on justice and peace issues***

Conclusions

We are all peace-makers. Communication for just peace is all about our attitude. The worst barriers to peace can be words and the way we tell our stories, in a way that we do not understand each other. To do communication for just peace, you need to keep your eyes, ears and heart open, monitor what is happening, expect the unexpected, travel to unusual places and speak to those who are most affected by the situation.

**For more information**

12 Faces of Hope

<https://www.oikoumene.org/en/what-we-do/12-faces-of-hope>

WCC Communication Strategy

<https://www.oikoumene.org/en/press-centre/news/wcc-executive-committee-approves-communication-strategy>