

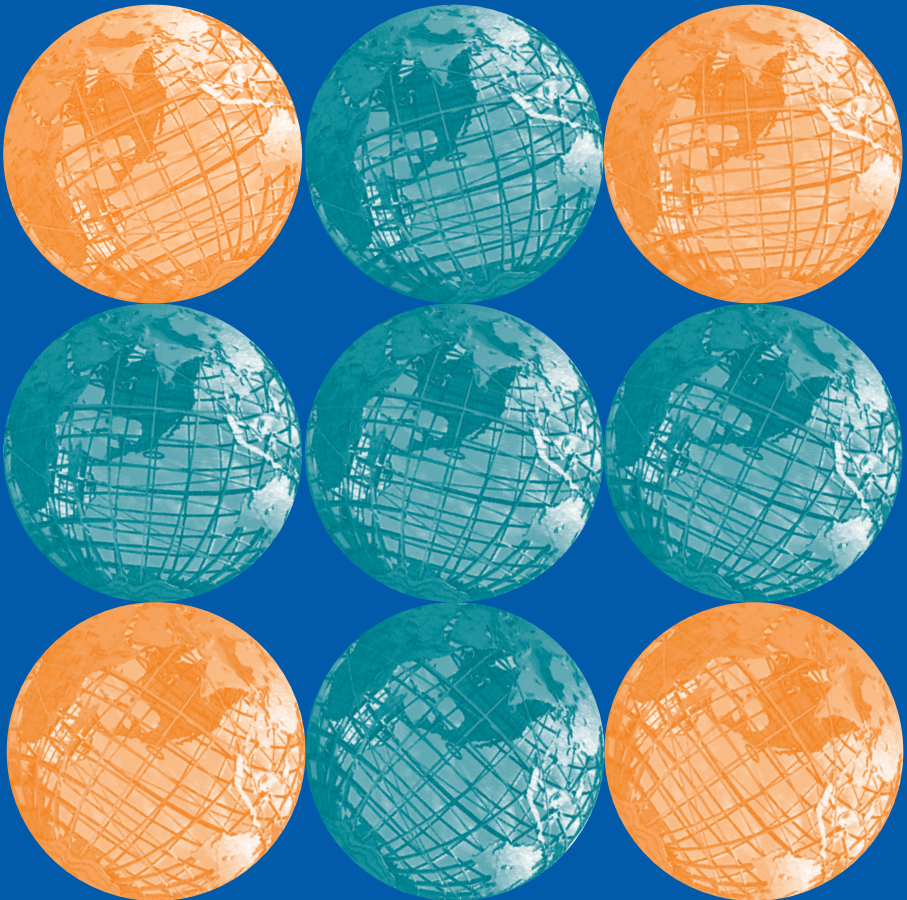


World Council
of Churches

THE CHURCHES IN INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS

Reports

2007–2009



**T h e C h u r c h e s
i n I n t e r n a t i o n a l
A f f a i r s**

Reports 2007-2009

**Commission of the Churches on International Affairs
of the World Council of Churches**

**Commission of the Churches on International Affairs
of the World Council of Churches**

Ecumenical Centre
P.O. Box 2100
150, route de Ferney
1211 Geneva 2
Switzerland

Tel. +41.22.791.61.11
Fax +41.22.791.03.61
E-mail: ccia@wcc-coe.org
Website: <http://www.oikoumene.org/en/what-we-do/ccia>

**Commission of the Churches on International Affairs
of the World Council of Churches
Ecumenical UN Office**

Church Center for the United Nations
777 United Nations Plaza, Suite 9D
New York, NY 10017
U.S.A.

Tel. +1.212.867.58.90
Fax +1.212.867.74.62
E-mail: unlo@wcc-coe.org
Website: <http://www.oikoumene.org/en/what-we-do/wcc-un-office-new-york>

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150, route de Ferney
1211 Geneva 2
Switzerland
Website: <http://www.oikoumene.org>

IN MEMORIAM

Clement John
1941 – 2008

An excellent colleague and
a devoted servant of the Lord Jesus Christ,
the Prince of Peace

Executive secretary
International Affairs, Human Rights and the Asia-Pacific Region
(February 1993 – July 2006)

Acting director
Commission of the Churches in International Affairs
(August 2006 – December 2006)

Consultant
Commission of the Churches in International Affairs
(January – March 2007)

CONTENTS

MODERATOR'S INTRODUCTION	20
DIRECTOR'S INTRODUCTION	22
GLOBAL CONCERNS	24
<i>Environmental Justice</i>	24
Climate Change	24
• WCC Welcomes UN panel report on climate change, 2 February 2007	24
• WCC supports ground-breaking global framework to fight climate change, 20 February 2007	24
• WCC co-sponsored meeting of church-related relief and development agencies to renew and update common ecumenical advocacy positions and policy in relation to intergovernmental negotiations on climate change, 12-15 April 2007	25
• Statement on the 10th anniversary of the Kyoto Protocol adopted by WCC executive committee, Etchmiadzin, Armenia, 25–28 September 2007	27
• Statement from WCC to the High-Level Ministerial Segment of the 13 th Session of the Conference of the Parties – COP13 to the UNFCCC 3 rd Session of the Meeting of the Parties to the Kyoto Protocol – CMP3, Nusa Dua, Bali, Indonesia, December 14, 2007	30
• Minute on global warming and climate change adopted by WCC central committee, Geneva, Switzerland, 13–20 February 2008	32
• Message from WCC general secretary to the meeting of the Council of the Lutheran World Federation focusing on climate change, 24 June 2008	35
• Statement from the WCC to the high-level ministerial segment of the 14th Session of the Conference of the Parties – COP14 to the UNFCCC, 4th Session of the Meeting of the Parties to the Kyoto Protocol – CMP4, Poznań, Poland, 12 December 2008	37
• Climate change and human rights – churches' viewpoints, WCC presentation at UN Human Rights Council side event, 16 June 2009	40
• Statement on eco-justice and ecological debt adopted by WCC central committee, Geneva, Switzerland, 26 August–2 September 2009	43
• Letter of concern from WCC general secretary to the members of the Greenland Dialogue calling for the inclusion of an equity dimension in any forthcoming Copenhagen agreement, 14 September 2009	47
• Letter from WCC general secretary to WCC members churches, REOs, CWCs, Specialized Ministries and IEOs, encouraging practical actions to express the commitment of Christian churches and the whole ecumenical movement to care for creation, 15 September 2009	48
• The global economic crisis: effects and policy responses, immediate challenges related to debt and climate change, Hearing with civil society and the private sector at the fifty-sixth session of the UNCTAD Trade and Development Board, 16 September 2009	50
• Statement from the WCC to the high-level ministerial segment of the 15th Session of the Conference of the Parties – COP15 – to the UNFCCC and the 5th Session of the Meeting of the Parties to the Kyoto Protocol – CMP5, Copenhagen, Denmark, 18 December 2009	52
<i>Economic Justice</i>	55
• WCC acting general secretary calls for reform of international financial institutions following the resignation of World Bank president, Paul Wolfowitz, 18 May 2007	55

• Statement on linking poverty, wealth and ecology in Africa, Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, 5-9 November 2007 _____	55
• Letter to Mr Peter Mandelsohn, EU trade commissioner, on signing of interim partnership agreements by African, Caribbean and Pacific (APC) countries, 5 December 2007 _____	59
• Joint written statement made at the United Nations Human Rights Council’s seventh session calling for the eradication of extreme poverty as a condition to the full and effective enjoyment of the human right to peace, 25 February 2008 _____	61
• Joint communiqué issued by the WCC, WARC and CWM following a workshop on the spirituality of resistance, liberation and transformation, Matanzas, Cuba, 15-20 May 2008 _____	64
• Statement by WCC general secretary about the global food crisis made on the occasion of the Conference on World Food Security, Rome, Italy, 3-5 June 2008 _____	67
• Joint written statement made at the United Nations Human Rights Council’s ninth session calling for the global food crisis to be examined from the perspective of access to food being considered a fundamental human right, 10 September 2008 _____	69
• The Guatemala Declaration from the AGAPE Consultation, the links between poverty, wealth and ecology: ecumenical perspectives in Latin America and the Caribbean, 10 October 2008 _____	70
• Statement on the global food crisis by the WCC general secretary on World Food Day, 16 October 2008 _____	76
• Statement by WCC general secretary on the global financial crisis, 14 November 2008 _____	80
• Opening address by WCC general secretary at conference on Confronting the Global Food Challenge, Geneva, Switzerland, 24 November 2008 _____	83
• Call co-issued by WCC for NGOs, trade unions and social movements to sign onto a new economic and social model as an alternative to the present one, Belem, Brazil, 1 February 2009 _____	84
• CCIA says global financial crisis represents the opportunity to deeply transform the international financial system for good, Matanzas, Cuba, 15-20 March 2009 _____	85
• Letter to the Rt. Hon. Gordon Brown MP and leaders of G20 countries regarding the Global Economic and Financial Crisis, 27 March 2009 _____	86
• Letter from WCC general secretary to H.E. Father Miguel d’Escoto Brockmann, president of the 63rd session of the United Nations General Assembly regarding the global financial crisis, 1 April 2009 _____	88
• Joint action alert sent to H. E. Ban Ki-moon, secretary general of the United Nations, on the occasion of the launching of a global campaign on food to overcome hunger and to improve livelihoods in harmony with creation and social justice, 11 May 2009 _____	91
• Joint written statement made at the United Nations Human Rights Council’s eleventh session strongly supporting the process of developing guiding principles on extreme poverty and human rights, June 2009 _____	93
• Statement on just finance and the economy of life adopted by WCC central committee, Geneva, Switzerland, 26 August–2 September 2009 _____	94
• Letter from WCC general secretary to the G20 leaders informing them of the central committee statement on “just finance and the economy of life”, 23 September 2009 _____	98

Water **100**

• Statement of the conference “Churches for Water in Africa”, Entebbe, Uganda, 25 May 2007 _____	100
--	-----

Health **102**

• Participation of WCC general secretary at the International Women’s Summit about HIV/AIDS, 4-7 July 2007 _____	102
--	-----

- Aide Memoire from the Global Consultation on Genetics and New Biotechnologies and the Ministry of the Church, Johannesburg, South Africa, 2-5 December 2007 _____ 102
- Minute on ‘health for all’, adopted by WCC executive committee, Lübeck, Germany, 23-26 September 2008 _____ 106
- Statement presented at the World Health Organization’s high-level consultation on the financial crisis and global health, 19 January 2009 _____ 109
- Call to the WHO, member states, social movements and civil society organizations at the 62nd World Health Assembly, 15–16 May 2009 _____ 112

Human Rights 116

- WCC international consultation on “Towards protection of human rights and human dignity amidst conflicts”, Geneva, Switzerland, 5-7 December 2007 _____ 116
- Statement on democratic electoral processes, adopted by WCC central committee, Geneva, Switzerland, 13–20 February 2008 _____ 117
- Tribute to the life and work of Clement John, programme executive for Human Rights at the WCC, 2 June 2008 _____ 119
- Statement on the 60th anniversary of the UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights, adopted by WCC executive committee, Lübeck, Germany, 23–26 September 2008 _____ 121

Interreligious Relations and Dialogue 124

- “How can religions live together?” Keynote lecture by WCC general secretary at 31st German Kirchentag, 7 June 2007 _____ 124
- Meeting of US Christian leaders with Iranian President Ahmadinejad, 27 September 2007 _____ 129
- WCC Welcomes letter from Muslim leaders entitled “A Common Word between Us and You,” 15 October 2007 _____ 130
- *"This letter is most welcome,"* said World Council of Churches (WCC) general secretary Rev. Dr Samuel Kobia, especially at a time when *"all of humanity is looking to religious leaders for guidance as to how to respond to the situation of violence in the world". Kobia was commenting on the letter "A Common Word between Us and You,"* saying that it *"gives a lot of hope"*. _____ 130
- Minute on our religious imperative to foster sensitivity and reconciliation in a shifting society, adopted by WCC central committee, Geneva, Switzerland, 13–20 February 2008 _____ 131
- Letter from WCC general secretary to HRH Prince Ghazi bin Muhammad bin Talal of Jordan in response to the letter *A Common Word Between Us and You*, 18 March 2008 _____ 132
- Commentary from WCC general secretary to member churches in response to the letter *A Common Word Between Us and You*, written by 138 Muslim scholars and sent to Christian leaders worldwide, 20 March 2008 _____ 134
- Statement from the WCC director of Interreligious Dialogue and Cooperation criticizing the movie *Fitna*, released online by Dutch parliamentarian Geert Wilders, 28 March 2008 _____ 138
- Address by Metropolitan Emmanuel (Adamakis) of France speaking on behalf of the WCC at the World Conference on Dialogue, Madrid, Spain, 18 July 2008 _____ 139
- International dialogue between religious leaders from Christian, Jewish, Muslim and other faith traditions and political figures exploring faith perspectives and the role of religion regarding global issues, 25 September 2008 _____ 141
- Keynote lecture given by Catholicos Aram I: “Living as a Community with Islam – Concerns, Challenges and Promises” at an ecumenical consultation of church leaders and experts on Christian-Muslim dialogue, Geneva, Switzerland, 18-20 October 2008 _____ 143
- Signing of the statement “Faith in Human Rights” by WCC general secretary at the international interreligious conference on Faith in Human Rights on the occasion of the 60th

anniversary of the UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights, The Hague, Netherlands, 10 December 2008	153
• Joint communiqué on religion and peaceful co-existence issued by the WCC and the Centre for Interreligious Dialogue of the Islamic Culture and Relations Organization on the occasion of their fifth symposium, Tehran, Iran, 13-14 December 2008	154
• Formation of a coalition of 45 religious, inter-faith and value-based organizations from around the globe to advance a “United Nations Decade for Interreligious and Intercultural Dialogue, Understanding and Cooperation for Peace”, New York, USA, 2-4 March 2009	156
• Address by WCC general secretary at the Third Congress of Leaders of World and Traditional Religions: The role of religious leaders in building a peaceful society based on tolerance, mutual respect and cooperation, Astana, Kazakhstan, 1 July 2009	157
• Minute on the responsibility of churches for communities enduring anti-Christian violence adopted by WCC central committee, 26 August–2 September, Geneva, Switzerland 2009	161
<i>Just and Inclusive Communities</i>	162
Discrimination/Racism	162
• Statement from the delegates of the ecumenical conference "Abolished, but Not Destroyed: Remembering the Slave Trade in the 21 st Century", December 2007	162
• Joint written statement made at the United Nations Human Rights Council’s seventh session against the issue of caste-based discrimination, 25 February 2008	169
• Joint oral statement regarding caste-based discrimination made at the United Nations Human Rights Council’s eighth session on the consideration of the Universal Periodic Review Report of India, 10 June 2008	171
• Address to the United Nations on the occasion of a WCC co-organized meeting on The Human Right to Peace and the Eradication of Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance, New York, USA, 27 March 2009	172
• Joint oral intervention by WCC and LWF at the United Nations' Durban Review Conference, Geneva, Switzerland, 24 April 2009	175
• Statement from WCC conference: Churches Responding to the Challenges of Racism and Related Forms of Discrimination and Exclusion, Doorn, Netherlands, 17 June 2009	177
• Statement on caste-based discrimination, adopted by WCC central committee, Geneva, Switzerland, 26 August–2 September 2009	180
Indigenous Peoples	183
• Joint statement critical of carbon trading delivered by the Indigenous Environmental Network and other Indigenous representatives at the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues (PFII), New York, USA, 2 May 2008	183
• Statement of solidarity with indigenous peoples from the “International Consultation on Ecclesial and Social Visions of the Indigenous Peoples”, Baguio City, Philippines, 26 October 2008	184
• Joint declaration of indigenous churches made at the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, 21 May 2009	186
• Letter from WCC general secretary to Sr. Alan Garcia Pérez, president of the Republic of Peru expressing concern over the loss of life and violent displacement of indigenous peoples, 9 June 2009	187
<i>Migration</i>	190
• Global migration and new ecclesial realities, address by WCC general secretary, Cardiff, United Kingdom, 25 April 2007	190

- Meeting of the Global Ecumenical Network on Migration (GEM), Nairobi, Kenya, 6-8 June 2007 _____ 197
- Comments of the delegates of AACC, Caritas Europa’s Migration Commission, CCME, MECC and WCC to the Global Forum on Migration and Development, Brussels, Belgium, 9 July 2007 _____ 198
- Statement from the public hearing on “The Changing Ecclesial Context: Impact of Migration on Living Together” issued by WCC and MECC, Beirut, Lebanon: 14–16 April 2008 _____ 200
- Visits to nine country missions during the United Nations Advocacy Week to urge countries to sign and ratify the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families, 20 November 2008. _____ 201
- Press release at the end of a meeting of representatives from African, European and migrant churches at the African and European churches’ consultation on migration and the changing ecclesial landscape, Palermo, Italy, 24 November 2008 _____ 203

Peace and Disarmament **204**

Disarmament _____ **204**

- Statement of WCC general secretary on the agreement reached at the Six Party Talks, 15 February 2007 _____ 204
- Statement on cluster munitions adopted by WCC central committee, Geneva, Switzerland, 13–20 February, 2008 _____ 205
- Comment made by WCC general secretary on the occasion of a multilateral agreement banning the use of cluster munitions reached in Dublin by 110 governments, 28 May 2008 _____ 207
- Public comment on the signing of the Cluster Munitions Convention in Oslo by WCC general secretary, 3 December 2008 _____ 208
- Oral intervention of the Geneva NGO Committee for Disarmament at a civil society session of the UN Conference on Disarmament, on “New Cooperation in the CD: Doing What Our Times Demand”, 8 September 2009 _____ 208

Peace _____ **213**

- International ecumenical conference on “Forgiveness, peace and reconciliation” exploring Christian thought and contributions to peace, reconciliation and forgiveness, Volos, Greece, 17-20 May 2007 _____ 213
- Observation of International Day of Prayer for Peace, 21 September 2007 _____ 214
- Consultation on “Healing of Memories – Reconciling Communities”, Dublin, Ireland, 1-4 October 2007 _____ 215
- Participation of WCC general secretary in panel discussion on “Faiths, War and Peace”, Naples, Italy, 23 October 2007 _____ 216
- Presentation of WCC general secretary “Can churches be peacemakers in a world racked by violence?”, Washington DC, USA, 16 December 2007 _____ 216
- Observation of the International Day of Prayer for Peace, 21 September 2008 _____ 217
- Public hearing on reconciliation held at the WCC headquarters highlighting the contribution and role of churches in reconciliation processes around the world, 19 February 2009 _____ 218
- Meeting on “Peace Ethics in Orthodoxy” in preparation for the International Ecumenical Peace Convocation, 29 June-3 July 2009 _____ 219
- Public statement on the occasion of the 60th anniversary of the Geneva Conventions, 12 August 2009 _____ 220
- Minute on the right of conscientious objection to military service adopted by WCC central committee, Geneva, Switzerland, 26 August–2 September 2009 _____ 221

Nuclear Weapons	223
• Statement on the need for churches' vigilance against nuclear proliferation, WCC executive committee, Bossey, Switzerland, 27 February–2 March 2007	223
• Speech given by WCC general secretary at the 100 th Anniversary Conference of the Great Korean Revival, 9 August 2007	226
• Excerpt from address by Dr Soritua Nababan on nuclear arms, speaking on behalf of WCC at the World Religious Leaders Summit for Peace on the occasion of the G8 Hokkaido Tokyo Summit, Sapporo, Japan 2-3 July 2008	232
• Letter to the Council of Churches in Namibia thanking them for their help in having arranged meetings with government officials to discuss the churches' position on the Treaty of Pelindaba and a NWFZ, 13 October 2008	236
• Letter from WCC general secretary to Ambassador Bethuel Kiplagat of the Africa Peace Forum and Mr André September, president of the UCCSA and CCIA commissioner, thanking them for their leadership and collaboration in the visits to the government of Namibia regarding the ratification of the Treaty of Pelindaba, 17 November 2008	237
• Letter from WCC general secretary to government officials thanking them for meeting with the WCC to discuss the ratification of the Treaty of Pelindaba, 25 March 2009	238
• Letter from WCC general secretary to The Most Rev. Bernard Ntahoturi, Archbishop of the Anglican Church of Burundi and Ambassador Bethuel Kiplagat of the Africa Peace Forum, thanking them for their service and leadership of the WCC delegation to Burundi in support of the African NWFZ, 25 March 2009	239
• Letter to NATO secretary general with copies to heads of government of the NATO member states regarding NATO's reliance on nuclear weapons, 30 March 2009	240
• Letters from WCC general secretary to Burundi government officials thanking them for their recent meeting with a WCC delegation to discuss the ratification of the Treaty of Pelindaba, 7 April 2009	242
• Letter from WCC general secretary to Rev. Pastor Isaac Bimpenda, president of the National Council of Churches in Burundi, thanking him for meeting with a WCC delegation to discuss the ratification of the Treaty of Pelindaba, 7 April 2009	243
• Public comment by WCC general secretary on the North Korea nuclear test, 25 May 2009	244
• Public statement by WCC general secretary on the Russia-US nuclear agreement, 7 July 2009	245
• Letter of thanks from WCC general secretary to officials in Burundi for having deposited the 28 th ratification of the African NWFZ Treaty, with which the Treaty of Pelindaba entered into force, 24 August 2009	246
• Statement of hope in a year of opportunity: seeking a nuclear-weapon-free world, WCC central committee, Geneva, Switzerland, 26 August–2 September 2009	247
• Letter from WCC general secretary to members of the UN Security Council prior to a special heads-of-state session of the Security Council asking for a clear commitment to joint action, 18 September 2009	250
• Joint NGO statement to UN General Assembly First Committee on "Operationalizing the vision of a nuclear weapon free world", 23 October 2009	251
• Joint letter to leaders of NATO and the European Union concerning NATO nuclear policy, 28 October 2009	255
• Letter from WCC general secretary to the governments of North and South Korea, Japan, China, Russia and the US, urging the United States of America and the Democratic People's Republic of Korea to hold bilateral talks within the context of the resumed Six-Party Talks on North Korea's nuclear programme, 12 November 2009	256

United Nations Relations

259

• Statement on the United Nations Peacebuilding Commission, adopted by WCC executive committee, Bossey, Switzerland, 27 February–2 March 2007 _____	259
• WCC participation in 60 th World Health Assembly, 14-23 May 2007 _____	261
WCC supports proposal for rational use of medicines _____	261
• Oral Intervention on Item 4 of the UN Human Rights Council regarding extrajudicial executions in the Philippines, 24 September 2007 _____	265
• UN and WCC general secretaries reaffirm commitment to strong and close collaboration, 29 October 2007 _____	267
• UN and WCC general secretaries forge closer partnership on climate change and democracy issues, 3 March 2008 _____	268
• Letter from WCC general secretary to H.E. Mr Ban Ki-moon, UN secretary general, expressing appreciation for the efforts and leadership he demonstrated, both in helping solve the humanitarian crisis in Myanmar arising from cyclone Nargis and in visiting the earthquake-stricken Sichuan Province in China, 3 June 2008 _____	269
Women _____	271
• Statement on International Women’s day, 8 March 2009, WCC executive committee, Bossey, Switzerland, 17-20 February 2009 _____	271
• Joint written statement made at the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women fifty-third session entitled “Partners for Change: Faith-based responses to gender inequality, care giving and HIV”, New York, USA, March 2009 _____	274
• Joint oral statement made at the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women fifty-third session on the subject of the HIV pandemic, gender roles and the global response, New York, USA, 9 March 2009 _____	280
• Workshop entitled “United to End Violence Against Women” held to reflect on the recent International Women’s Day, Geneva, Switzerland, 12 March 2009 _____	281
• Letter from WCC general secretary to WCC member churches, CWCs, REOs, specialized ministries and IEOs encouraging them to keep gender issues on the agenda and in the life of the church, 26 March 2009 _____	283
REGIONAL CONCERNS _____	285
Africa _____	285
African Union _____	285
• Letter from WCC general secretary to H.E. Dr Jean Ping, chairperson of the African Union Commission on the occasion of his election to that office, 18 March 2009 _____	285
Angola and Mozambique _____	286
• Synthesis of report on “Living letters” ecumenical team visit to Angola and Mozambique, 18-28 July 2009 _____	286
Democratic Republic of Congo _____	287
• Meeting of an ecumenical delegation with the president of the Democratic Republic of Congo, Mr Joseph Kabila, 11 November 2008 _____	287
• Statement on the situation In the Democratic Republic of Congo, WCC executive committee, 17–20 February 2009 _____	289
• Letter to Mr Ban Ki-moon, UN secretary general, on the situation in the Democratic Republic of Congo, 18 March 2009 _____	293

• Excerpts from “Living letters” ecumenical team visit to the Democratic Republic of Congo, 8-14 July 2009 _____	294
• Statement on sexual violence against women in the Democratic Republic of Congo adopted by WCC central committee, Geneva, Switzerland, 26 August–2 September 2009 _____	301
Eritrea _____	304
• WCC delegation visit to Eritrea affirming WCC’s commitment to churches engaged in peace, reconciliation and nation-building efforts, 16-19 May 2007 _____	304
Horn of Africa _____	305
• Statement on the situation in the Horn of Africa, WCC executive committee, Bossey, Switzerland, 27 February–2 March 2007 _____	305
Liberia and Sierra Leone _____	311
• Synthesized report from “Living letters” ecumenical team visit to Liberia and Sierra Leone, 2-8 November 2008 _____	311
Kenya _____	313
• Statement by WCC general secretary on post-election violence in Kenya, 2 January 2008 _____	313
• Statement by WCC general secretary on initiatives to overcome violence in Kenya, 9 January 2008 _____	314
• Letter from WCC general secretary to the Heads of WCC member churches in Kenya expressing concern and assuring them of support following the recent violence, 16 January 2008 _____	315
• Statement on the crisis in Kenya and the churches' response, WCC central committee, Geneva, Switzerland, 13–20 February 2008 _____	317
Nigeria _____	320
• Letter of concern to Mr Umaru Musa Yar'Adua, president of the Federal Republic of Nigeria over the recent violent clashes in northern Nigeria, 4 August 2009 _____	320
• Letter from WCC general secretary to churches in Nigeria expressing profound sorrow and shock at the outbreak of violence in Maiduguri, 4 August 2009 _____	321
Somalia _____	321
• Message sent to Rt Rev. Dr Mvume Dandala, AACC general secretary, on Muslim Christian leaders peace initiative on Somalia, 3-4, February 2007, Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, 26 January 2007 _____	321
South Africa _____	322
• Visit of Archbishop Desmond Tutu to the WCC, 20 May 2008 _____	322
• Letter from WCC general secretary to member churches in South Africa and the South African Council of Churches regarding wave of xenophobic attacks and murders, 6 June 2008 _____	324
• Letter from WCC general secretary to Dr Nelson Mandela, congratulating him on the occasion of his 90th birthday, 18 July 2008 _____	325
Sudan _____	326
• Minute on Darfur adopted by WCC executive committee, Etchmiadzin, Armenia, 25-28 September 2007 _____	326
• Ecumenical solidarity visit to Sudan, 26 March-2 April 2008 _____	327
• Report of the study on genocide with regard to the Darfur crisis approved by the WCC executive committee, Lübeck, Germany, 23-26 September 2008 _____	334

• Letter to Lieutenant-General Omar Hassan Ahmad al-Bashir, president of the Republic of Sudan, on the discontinuation of humanitarian aid services, 11 March 2009 _____	340
• Letter from WCC general secretary to member churches in Sudan, the Sudan Council of Churches and REOs in the area regarding crimes committed in Darfur, 9 October 2008 _____	341
• Statement on the Darfur crisis in the context of Sudan adopted by the WCC central committee, Geneva, Switzerland, 26 August–2 September 2009 _____	342
Tanzania _____	345
• WCC delegation visit to Tanzania, 1-3 July 2007 _____	345
Uganda _____	346
• Synthesized report of “Living letters” ecumenical team visit to Uganda, 27 October-2 November 2008 _____	346
• Letter to President Yoweri Kaguta Museveni, Republic of Uganda raising concerns regarding the Anti-Homosexual Bill, 2009, 22 December 2009 _____	348
Zimbabwe _____	349
• Letter to H.E. Mr Ban Ki-moon, UN secretary general, expressing concern about the current political crisis, 11 April 2008 _____	349
• Letter to H.E. Levy Mwanawasa, president, Republic of Zambia, expressing gratitude for the initiative to convene a summit about the political crisis in Zimbabwe, 11 April 2008 _____	350
• Statement of concern by WCC general secretary about the integrity of elections, 25 April, 2008 _____	350
• Letter from WCC general secretary to member churches inviting them to observe a Day of Prayer for Peace in Zimbabwe, 17 June 2008 _____	352
• Letter from WCC general secretary to UN secretary general H.E. Mr Ban Ki-moon, calling on the UN to assist in ending the violence and humanitarian suffering in Zimbabwe, 18 June 2008 _____	353
• Joint letter from the WCC and the WSCF regarding the rapidly deteriorating situation in Zimbabwe, 24 June 2008 _____	354
• Open statement by WCC general secretary after the elections in Zimbabwe, 4 July 2008 _____	356
• Joint global ecumenical leaders Statement on the Zimbabwe Political Parties Pact, 24 July 2008 _____	358
• Letter to Zimbabwean government officials on implementation of the Global Political Agreement, 6 November 2009 _____	360
• Call by WCC and AACC general secretaries to observe a day of prayer for the people of Zimbabwe on 25 January “in midst of the current humanitarian, legitimacy and governance crisis”, 20 January 2009 _____	362
Asia-Pacific _____	363
Australia _____	363
• Letter from WCC general secretary to the Hon. Kevin Rudd, prime minister of Australia, conveying appreciation at the speech he made to the Australian parliament on 13 February formally apologizing to Australia’s Indigenous Peoples, 16 May 2008 _____	363
Democratic People’s Republic of Korea _____	364
• Meeting of WCC general secretary and WCC delegation with North Korean President Kim Yong-nam, 19 October 2009 _____	364
Fiji _____	365

• Letter from WCC general secretary to Mr Isikeli Kini of the Methodist Church in Fiji following the arrest of several church leaders and the ban on the church’s annual conference, 23 July 2009 _____	365
• Minute on the situation facing the Methodist Church in Fiji and Rotuma, adopted by the WCC central committee, 26 August–2 September 2009 _____	366
India _____	369
• Letter of congratulations from WCC general secretary to Metropolitan Dr Joseph Mar Irenaeus, the new head of the Mar Thoma Church, on his enthronement, 1 October 2007 _____	369
• Joint letter from WCC and LWF to Dr Manmohan Singh, prime minister of India, regarding the violence against Christians in the State of Orissa, 4 July 2008 _____	370
• Letter from WCC general secretary to member churches in India, NCCI, Utkal Christian Council and Jeypore Evangelical Lutheran Church expressing the solidarity and prayerful support of WCC member churches and partners following the violence being perpetrated against Christians in the State of Orissa, 3 September 2008 _____	371
• Statement on religious violence and intolerance in India, adopted by the WCC executive committee, Lübeck, Germany, 23-26 September 2008 _____	372
• Letter from WCC general secretary to Dr Manmohan Singh, prime minister of India in response to the terrorist attacks in Mumbai, 27 November 2008 _____	375
Indonesia _____	375
• Oral intervention to the UN Human Rights Council, on item 4, general debate: the human rights situation in the province of Papua, Indonesia, 11 March, 2008 _____	375
• NGO Report-Universal Periodic Review, submitted by CCIA for consideration in April 2008 ____	377
• Synthesis report of “Living Letters” ecumenical team visit to Indonesia, 17-24 July 2008 _____	386
• Letter of condolence from WCC general secretary to H.E. Dr H. Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono, president of the Republic of Indonesia, offering deep sympathy and prayers to the victims of the earthquake which struck the West Sumatra province, 2 October 2009 _____	388
Pacific Region _____	388
• Greetings from WCC general secretary to the delegates and participants in the Pacific Conference of Churches' 9th Assembly, 30 August 2007 _____	388
Pakistan _____	390
• Statement on the crisis in Pakistan adopted by the WCC central committee, Geneva, Switzerland, 13-20 February 2008 _____	390
• Letters from WCC general secretary regarding the charges brought against Mr Joseph Francis, Rev. Emmanuel Khokhar and Bishop Samuel Azariah, 20 July 2009 _____	392
• Letter of concern to Mr Asif Ali Zardari, president of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan regarding attacks against Christians in Pakistan, 3 August 2009 _____	393
• Statement on the misuse of the Blasphemy Law and the security of religious minorities in Pakistan, adopted by WCC central committee, Geneva, Switzerland, 26 August–2 September 2009 _____	394
People’s Republic of China _____	396
• Letter from WCC general secretary to H.E. Hu Jintao, president of the People’s Republic of China, expressing condolences at the deaths and wide- scale damage following the earthquake in Sichuan Province, 21 May 2008 _____	396
Philippines _____	397

• Expression of concern by WCC general secretary regarding the worsening human rights situation in the Philippines, Manila, Philippines, 21 November 2007 _____	397
• UN Human Rights Council, general debate on item 3: Report of the special rapporteur on human rights defenders, 7 th session, 13 March 2008 _____	399
• Oral intervention at the 8th session of the Human Rights Council interactive dialogue on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions, 3 June 2008 _____	401
• Oral Intervention at the UN Human Rights Council 8 th Session, Item 6: Consideration of UPR Reports – Philippines, 10 June 2008 _____	403
• Testimony of Rev. Berlin Guerrero of the United Church of Christ in the Philippines before the United Nations Committee against Torture 42nd session, 27 April 2009 _____	404
• Letter from WCC general secretary to the general secretaries of WCC member churches in the Philippines and the NCCP offering heartfelt condolences to the families of victims affected by Typhoon Ketzana, 2 October 2009 _____	406
Republic of Korea _____	407
• Letter from WCC acting general secretary to Rev. Oh-sung Kwon, general secretary of NCCCK, regarding Korean hostages held in Afghanistan, 24 July 2007 _____	407
• Meeting of WCC general secretary with families of the Korean Christian humanitarian workers being held by the Taliban in Afghanistan, 14 August 2007 _____	407
• Letter to the general secretary of NCCCK on the release of the Korean hostages held in Afghanistan, 31 August 2007 _____	409
• Letter from WCC general secretary to Mr Lee Myung-bak, president of the Republic of Korea expressing concern at the shift in South Korean policy with regards to North Korea, 1 July 2008 _____	409
• Letter from WCC general secretary to member churches in South Korea, the National Council of Churches in Korea and the Korean Christian Federation informing them of the letter sent by the WCC to the president of the Republic of Korea, 1 July 2008 _____	411
• Letter of condolence from WCC general secretary to Dr Whi Ho Lee, general secretary of NCCCK, on the death of Mr Kim Dae-jung, former president of South Korea, 18 August 2009 _____	412
• Tsuen Wan Communiqué from International Consultation on Peace, Reconciliation and Reunification of the Korean Peninsula: Towards an Ecumenical Vision beyond the Tozanso Process, 23 October 2009 _____	413
South Asia _____	416
• Statement of the international consultation on peace, security and development in South Asia by WCC-CCA-South Asian councils of churches, 30 March to 2 April 2009 _____	416
South Pacific _____	419
• Letter from WCC general secretary to The Most Reverend Jabez Leslie Bryce, bishop of Polynesia Anglican Church, to communicate the distress and sadness felt on hearing of the 8.3 magnitude earthquake and resulting tsunami, 1 October 2009 _____	419
Sri Lanka _____	420
• Expression of concern by WCC general secretary at the deteriorating situation in Sri Lanka, 20 April 2007 _____	420
• Living Letters ecumenical team to visit to Sri Lanka, 4-12 August 2007 _____	422
• Statement on the humanitarian crisis in Sri Lanka adopted at the WCC executive committee, Lübeck, Germany, 23-26 February 2008 _____	424

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Letter from WCC general secretary to H.E. Mahinda Rajapaksa, president of Sri Lanka, expressed concern at news of the killing of journalist Mr Lasantha Wickremetunge, 13 January 2009 _____ Letter from WCC general secretary to H.E. Mahinda Rajapaksa, president of Sri Lanka asking for the immediate release of Mr Shanta Fernando, executive secretary of the Justice and Peace Commission of the National Christian Council of Sri Lanka, 21 April 2009 _____ 	427 428
Taiwan _____	429
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Letter of condolence from WCC general secretary to Rev. Andrew T.C. Chang, general secretary of the Presbyterian Church in Taiwan, offering prayers and sympathy to the families of victims of Typhoon Morakot, 18 September 2009 _____ 	429
Europe	431
Armenia _____	431
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Statement by WCC Moderator Rev Dr Walter Altmann at the Armenian Genocide memorial, Yerevan, 25 September 2007 _____ 	431
Georgia _____	432
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Joint statement by WCC and CEC on the situation in Georgia, 12 August 2008 _____ WCC delegation to visit Georgia and Russia, including South Ossetia, 3-7 September 2008 _____ 	432 433
Germany _____	437
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Tribute to Prof. Dr Carl Friedrich von Weizsäcker, 7 May 2007 _____ Message from WCC general secretary to “Together for Europe 2007”, an ecumenical gathering of 12,000 Christians, European church leaders and politicians, 10 May 2007 _____ Statement by WCC general secretary offering prayers in commemoration of the fall of the Berlin Wall, 5 November 2009 _____ 	437 438 439
Ireland _____	440
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Public lecture delivered by WCC general secretary on “Hope and the healing of memories” and response to a lecture on “Prisoner abuse: from Abu Ghraib to the passion of the Christ” at the Irish School of Ecumenics, Dublin, Ireland, 30 April-1 May 2007 _____ 	440
Latvia and Estonia _____	441
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Visit of WCC general secretary to Latvia and Estonia, 29 May-2 June 2007 _____ 	441
Romania _____	448
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Greetings from WCC general secretary to delegates and participants in the Third European Ecumenical Assembly, Sibiu, Romania, 5 September 2007 _____ 	449
Serbia _____	451
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Letter from WCC general secretary to the Holy Synod of Bishops of the Serbian Orthodox Church about resolving the status of Kosovo, 24 April 2008 _____ Letter of condolence from WCC general secretary to His Eminence Metropolitan Anfilohije of Montenegro and Littoral Locum Tenens at the passing away of Patriarch Pavle of Serbia, 16 November 2009 _____ 	451 452
Turkey _____	453
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Letter to His Excellency Mr Ahmet Üzümcü, ambassador extraordinary and plenipotentiary, permanent representative of Turkey to the United Nations Office in Geneva, regarding concern 	

about killings and other threats directed at members and leaders of religious minorities in Turkey, 1 May 2007 _____	453
• Letter to His All Holiness Bartolomew I, ecumenical patriarch of Constantinople regarding the challenge to the use of the title “Ecumenical”, 29 August 2007 _____	455
• Report on visit of ecumenical delegation advocating for religious minorities' rights, 23 – 27 November 2009 _____	457
Sweden _____	458
• Message from the WCC to the LWF on the occasion of 60 years common Lutheran witness, Lund, Sweden, 24 March 2007 _____	458
United Kingdom _____	460
• Letter to the member churches of the WCC in the UK regarding Trident nuclear weapons, 9 March 2007 _____	460
• Letter to The Rt. Hon. Tony Blair, PC, MP, prime minister of Great Britain, on the bicentennial anniversary of the abolition of the trans-Atlantic slave trade, 16 March 2007 _____	461
<i>Latin America and Caribbean</i> _____	463
Brazil _____	463
• Letter to H.E. Luís Inácio Lula da Silva, president of Brazil, on the quest for social justice and the struggle for freedom, democracy and human rights, 13 December 2007 _____	463
Chile _____	464
• Letter to H.E. Michelle Bachelet, President of the Republic of Chile regarding justice for the Mapuche People, 8 February 2008 _____	464
Colombia _____	465
• Message from the director of CCIA on the liberation of Colombian hostages, 14 January 2008 _____	465
• Open comment by WCC general secretary expressing joy at the release of Ms Ingrid Betancourt and other hostages but also calling for the release by the FARC of other hostages still held, 3 July 2008 _____	466
Cuba _____	467
• Letter to The Hon. Condoleezza Rice, US secretary of state, regarding Cuban citizens imprisoned in the U.S., 23 May 2007 _____	467
• Letter to Rev. Robert Edgar, general secretary of the National Council of Churches in Christ in the USA, regarding Cuban citizens imprisoned in the US, 23 May 2007 _____	468
• Letter from WCC general secretary to the Hon. Condoleezza Rice, US secretary of state, asking that the Cuban government be permitted to purchase construction materials and food in the USA following the hurricanes and tropical storms which had recently hit the region, 17 September 2008 _____	469
• CCIA calls for churches around the world to establish or further develop partnerships with Cuban churches and stressed the need for the USA to lift the blockade of Cuba, 15-20 March 2009 _____	470
Honduras _____	470
• Message from an international ecumenical team encouraging the churches in Honduras to “accompany the people in their search for peace with justice and the re-establishment of democracy”, Tegucigalpa, Honduras, 7 August 2009 _____	470

- Letter to H.E. Mr Ban Ki-moon, UN general secretary, regarding human rights violations, 15 September 2009 _____ 473

Middle East **474**

Egypt _____ **474**

- Visit of a WCC delegation to Egypt to learn about the situation of churches in the country and to discuss WCC activities in the Middle East, specifically promoting a just peace and interreligious dialogue, 16-21 June 2008 _____ 474

Iran _____ **476**

- Minute on Iran and the Middle East Regional Crisis by the WCC executive committee, Etchmiadzin, Armenia, 25-28 September 2007 _____ 476

Iraq _____ **478**

- Statement of WCC general secretary on the fourth anniversary of the war in Iraq, 15 March 2007 _____ 478
- Statement on Iraq and its Christian communities by the WCC executive committee, Etchmiadzin, Armenia, 25-28 September 2007 _____ 480
- Open statement from CCIA director joining with all Christians in Iraq and around the world in grieving the death of the Archbishop Paulos Faraj Rahho of Mosul, 13 March 2008 _____ 484
- Letter from WCC general secretary to H.E. Mr Nuri al-Maliki, prime minister of Iraq expressing support in opposing the victimization of Iraqi citizens based on their faith or ethnicity, 14 October 2008 _____ 484
- Letter from WCC general secretary to Rev. Dr Michael Kinnamon, general secretary of the NCCUSA, informing member churches in the US of appeals the WCC had made to leaders of the UN and the government of Iraq, seeking a swift end to the persecution of Christians and other minorities in Iraq, 14 October 2008 _____ 486
- Letter to H.E. Mr Ban Ki-moon, UN general secretary, regarding targeted attacks on the Christian community of Mosul, 14 October 2008 _____ 487
- Open letter from WCC general secretary to the churches in Iraq expressing the condolences and solidarity of Christians world-wide in reaction to the violence against Christians perpetrated in Mosul, 14 October 2008 _____ 488
- Final statement from the meeting of representatives of the churches in Iraq, Dar Sayedat al-Jabal, Lebanon, 9-11 February 2009 _____ 489
- Letter from WCC general secretary to the churches in Iraq expressing condolences and sympathy over the loss of life following the wave of attacks on churches and communities in Baghdad, Mosul and Kerkuk, 14 July 2009 _____ 490
- Letter from WCC general secretary to the ambassador of the Permanent Mission of Iraq to the UN in Geneva, expressing condolences to victims of terrorist attacks against the Iraqi Foreign ministry, Finance Ministry and other public targets in Baghdad, 25 August 2009 _____ 491
- Joint letter from WCC and CEC general secretaries to Ms Navanethem Pillay, UN high commissioner for Human Rights, conveying deepest concern for the well-being and security of members of the Iranian opposition People's Mojahedin Organization of Iran/PMOI in Camp Ashraf, Iraq, 18 September 2009 _____ 492
- Joint letter from WCC and CEC general secretaries to Ms Ahlam Al-Gailani, chargé d'affaires of the Permanent Mission of Iraq to the United Nations, conveying deepest concern for the well-being and security of members of the Iranian opposition People's Mojahedin Organization of Iran/PMOI in Camp Ashraf, Iraq, 29 September 2009 _____ 493
- Letter from WCC general secretary to H.E. Mr Nuri al-Maliki, prime minister of the Republic of Iraq, regarding the recent series of bombings in central Baghdad, 14 December 2009 _____ 494

Israel-Palestine	494
• Sixty Years of WCC Policy on Palestine/Israel, 1948-2008 (in brief), April 2007	494
• Letter to the Prime Minister of Jordan, Dr Marouf Suleiman al-Bakhit regarding the withdrawal of recognition of His Beatitude Theophilos III, Patriarch of the Holy City of Jerusalem and All Palestine, 18 May 2007	496
• Letter to the heads of churches and Christian communities in Jerusalem regarding prayers, seminars and advocacy events being organized on Sunday, 3 June 2007, 1 June 2007	497
• The Amman Call: WCC International Peace Conference, “Churches together for Peace and Justice in the Middle East”, Amman, Jordan, 18-20 June 2007	498
• Letter to H.E. Dr Condoleezza Rice, US secretary of state, H.E. Ehud Olmert, prime minister of Israel and H.E. Mahmoud Abbas, president of the Palestinian National Authority regarding the upcoming meeting related to Peace in the Middle East, 26 November 2007	501
• Statement made at the United Nations General Assembly Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People: Solemn Commemoration of the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People, 29 November 2007	503
• Minute on the humanitarian situation in the Gaza Strip, WCC central committee, Geneva, Switzerland, 13-20 February 2008	507
• Open letter from WCC general secretary condemning the attacks on civilians in the Gaza strip and in Israel, 3 March 2008	510
• Open statement from WCC general secretary “strongly condemning” the shootings at the Mercaz Harav Yeshiva and expressing sympathy to families of those killed or injured, 10 March 2008	511
• Open comment by WCC general secretary on the occasion of 60 years since the disintegration of the Palestinian state and the creation of the state of Israel, 9 May 2008	511
• Message from Global week of International Church Action for Peace in Palestine and Israel, 4-10 June 2008	512
• “ <i>Bern Perspective</i> ”. Final document from the Palestine Israel Ecumenical Forum (PIEF) International Theological Conference “Promised Land”, 13 September 2008	513
• Open statement on the Gaza crisis by WCC general secretary, 29 December 2008	515
• Letter from WCC general secretary to H. E. Mr Ban Ki-moon, UN secretary general, conveying WCC’s support for the leadership and work of the United Nations in Gaza during the present crisis, 7 January 2009	516
• Letter from WCC general secretary to member churches in the Middle East and churches in Jerusalem regarding a just peace in Israel and Palestine based on international resolutions, 7 January 2009	518
• Statement on the Gaza War adopted by WCC executive committee, 17–20 February 2009	519
• Letter from WCC general secretary to Mr Barack Obama, president of the U.S.A., expressing concern at the recent war in Gaza, the current situation there and Gaza’s essential role in the search for Israeli-Palestinian peace, 3 March 2009	522
• Letter from WCC general secretary to H.E. Mr Mahmoud Abbas, president of the Palestinian National Authority, voicing support for all parties to the conflict to fulfil specific obligations under international law, 11 March 2009	523
• Letter from WCC general secretary to H.E. Mr Ehud Olmert, prime minister of the State of Israel, expressing the concern of churches during and following the war in Gaza, 11 March 2009	524
• Letter from WCC general secretary to WCC member churches, CWCs, REOs, specialized ministries and IEOs calling them to share their concerns about Gaza with their governments, 2 April 2009	526

• Activity of the World Week for Peace in Palestine Israel led by the WCC to generate joint church action for a just peace, 4-10 June 2009 _____	527
• Letter from WCC general secretary to the United Church of Canada on the occasion of their 2009 General Conference, commending their on-going work for peace with justice in Israel-Palestine, 10 August 2009 _____	530
• Statement on Israeli settlements in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, adopted by the WCC central committee, Geneva, Switzerland, 26 August-2 September 2009 _____	531
• Letter to Mr Ban Ki-moon, general secretary, United Nations regarding implementation of the Goldstone Report recommendations, 18 November 2009 _____	534
• Statement by WCC general secretary on Israel's approval of 900 more housing units in Gilo settlement, 19 November 2009 _____	536
Syria _____	537
• Letter from WCC general secretary to H.E. Dr Bashar al-Asad, president of the Syrian Arab Republic, underlining the WCC's support for the steps the Syrian Government has taken in promoting inter-faith dialogue and in providing a safe haven for Iraqi, Palestinian and other refugees, 23 May 2008 _____	537
North America _____	539
United States of America _____	539
• Participation of the WCC United Nations Liaison Office in the fifth annual Ecumenical Advocacy Days, Washington D.C., USA, 9-12 March 2007 _____	539
• Statement by WCC general secretary regarding the killings at Virginia Tech University, 16 April 2007 _____	539
• Summary of "Living Letters" ecumenical team visit to the United States, 14-24 September 2007 _____	541
• Open letter by Rev. Dr Bernice Powell Jackson, WCC president from North America and moderator of the US Conference for the WCC to the peoples of the US Gulf Coast in the wake of Hurricane Gustav, 2 September 2008 _____	542
• Letter from WCC general secretary to US President-elect, Mr Barack Obama congratulating him on his election victory and expressing the full support of the WCC in his new role, 5 November 2008 _____	543
• Letter from WCC general secretary to Archbishop Vicken Aykazian, legate of the Diocese of the Armenian Church of America (Eastern) and president of the NCCUSA congratulating him on receiving the Ellis Island Medal of Honour, 15 May 2009 _____	544
• Letter to the US President Barack Obama on receiving the Nobel Peace Prize, 10 October 2009 _____	545
CCIA MEMBERSHIP _____	546
CCIA STAFF _____	547
ABBREVIATIONS _____	550

MODERATOR'S INTRODUCTION

It is with great pleasure and privilege that I present this volume of 'The Churches in International Affairs', which contains important documents on the World Council of Churches' involvement in international affairs through various actions of public witness during the period 2007-2009.

In response to various emerging issues at international, regional and national levels, the CCIA has been deeply involved in addressing such contexts on a day to day basis. Such actions included public issues statements by the general secretary, the governing body, and the officers of the central committee as well as other public issues actions such as sending letters of concerns and solidarity by the general secretary and the director of the CCIA. There have been other public issues initiatives and advocacy actions undertaken including representations to diplomatic missions, intergovernmental agencies, solidarity visits to affected areas and countries and facilitating mediations and negotiations.

WCC's public issues statements, communiqués and reports are normally addressed to a wide range of audiences; although they are primarily to the members of its fellowship, churches or ecumenical councils are not the only addressees. A large number of public issue statements are addressed to governments, heads of states and other authorities at various levels, inter-governmental systems or to the United Nations. Often, questions are raised about the impact of WCC's statements especially when requests and demand for immediate attention and urgent actions are not heeded by governments or authorities. This kind of poor response warrants the need for appropriate monitoring and follow-up by staff working in the area of CCIA's mandates.

The term beginning a new mandate of the CCIA started immediately after the 9th assembly of the WCC held in February 2006. Since then the CCIA experienced several changes. The new CCIA started with a significant change in its composition of membership as certain other Commissions and advisory bodies of WCC ended their mandates and merged with the CCIA. However, the new and integrated CCIA also has been mandated to take the lead in facilitating and coordinating WCC's public witness actions in various ways. The new CCIA expanded its size to 38 members ever since a new Commission was nominated by the central committee in its meeting held in early September 2006 and I assumed the responsibility as the moderator of the new CCIA Commission. Two meetings of the CCIA took place during the first quarter of the term the Commission – in Geneva, Switzerland in 2007 and Havana, Cuba in 2008.

There were several changes during the first three years since I assumed the responsibility as the moderator, immediately after the Port Alegre Assembly. Peter Weiderud, Director of the CCIA resigned from the position in July 2006 and Clement John became the Interim Acting Director starting from September 2006 until his retirement in March 2007. Subsequently Rev. Elenora Giddings-Ivory was appointed by the executive committee as the new CCIA director and she continued in the position until she resigned in June 2009. Dr Mathews George Chunakara, who has been on the staff since 2000, was appointed as the new Director of the CCIA by the central committee in its meeting in August-

September 2009. I take this opportunity to thank all these colleagues who facilitated and coordinated the programmes of the CCIA, especially the public issues actions and advocacy at various levels during the period of this report. The fruit of such intensive work done by various staff colleagues of WCC is reflected in the contents of this volume.

Rev. Kjell Magne Bondevik
Moderator, CCIA
Oslo, Norway 10 May 2014

DIRECTOR'S INTRODUCTION

The nature of the emerging issues at the international, regional and national levels demand responses by churches and the ecumenical movement as these issues are of particular concern for WCC's constituencies around the globe. Ecumenical actions in international affairs especially through public witness and global advocacy, thus, are an integral facet of the work of WCC and its Commission on the Churches on International Affairs (CCIA). The CCIA has had a special mandate to carry out this part of the agenda of the ecumenical movement ever since the CCIA was founded in 1946 as well as since the founding of the WCC in 1948. The tasks of advising the Council and its governing body and acting on behalf of the wider fellowship, especially to be engaged in the realm of international affairs have been traditional and historical roles and mandates of the CCIA over the decades. The years following the post-Port Alegre Assembly also have witnessed significant changes in international politics. The period during which the public statements made by WCC's governing body and the leadership cover a wide range of issues which emerged at the international, regional and national levels. Often, the struggle has been to select priorities when dealing with the emergence of most complex and pressing problems and calling the attention of the WCC for urgent responses and actions.

During the period covered in this report (2007-2009), the CCIA has been involved in a number of pressing issues in areas such as international affairs, war and peace, conflicts, disarmament, violence, economic justice, climate justice, freedom of religion, religious intolerance, ethnic and indigenous people's struggles, right to self-determination, etc. This was also the beginning of the period of a new structure for the CCIA that was introduced by the central committee by way of integrating certain other commissions and advisory committees. Unfortunately, lack of clarity before initiating the new structure resulted in rather unfocussed ways of working and in the end it has been proven that the new mandates and emphases added to the CCIA have not been effective. This has resulted in missing opportunities in setting the priorities for appropriate and timely actions, sharpening the focus of CCIA's involvement and effective coordination of advocacy and strengthening networks. However, the tasks of the CCIA within the framework of its cardinal responsibility and fundamental mandates continued during this period.

While realising the complex realities and challenges the ecumenical movement was called to respond to, all colleagues who have been working in the area of CCIA's mandates contributed immensely to ensure a quality programme in their respective areas of work. Certain new programmes also have been initiated during this period, such as the Middle East Focus, the drafting process of a Just Peace Declaration, plans for the culmination of the Decade to Overcome Violence (DOV) and sending living letters teams to accompany churches in conflict situations. Through numerous statements, the World Council of Churches continues to reaffirm its conviction that politics is an inseparable reality and churches' involvement in responding to such situations is a fundamental Christian responsibility. This triennial report published by the CCIA under the title 'The Churches in International Affairs: Reports 2007-2009' covers numerous public witness

actions carried out by the WCC through CCIA. The rich content of this report is also a reflection of the fulfilment of the mandate of CCIA.

We are thankful to the Rev. Elenora Giddings-Ivory (Presbyterian Church of USA), Director of the CCIA (September 2007 to June 2009) who provided leadership during this period.

Mathews George Chunakara
Director, CCIA
Geneva, Switzerland 10 May 2014

GLOBAL CONCERNS

ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE

Climate Change

- **WCC Welcomes UN panel report on climate change, 2 February 2007**

The World Council of Churches (WCC) programme on climate change and water has welcomed a report released today by the UN climate panel. The fourth major report in 20 years from the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) presents the overwhelming scientific consensus on greenhouse gas emissions.

It is "very likely," the report says, that emissions from fossil fuels and other human activities are the main causes of climate change. In IPCC terminology, "very likely" indicates at least 90 percent probability, and is the strongest link to human activities made by the panel since it was set up in 1988. The report also reminds us that correcting the damage already occasioned will take many centuries.

For Rev. Dr Martin Robra, responsible for the WCC's work on climate change, the global debate over human impact on the environment must now shift from denial and delays to responsibility and remedies – that are well within humanity's grasp.

Alarming scenarios concerning the consequences of climate change for people, plants and animals, the WCC says, should compel everybody to do their utmost to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and to support those already affected by storms, droughts, floods and rising sea levels.

The Council is calling a rapidly growing number of people in its constituency who are taking action on climate change to consult and use the information published in the IPCC report.

Its own work on climate change began in 1990, drawing the attention of churches and the wider public to the threat to future life of climate change, as well as to its actual impact today, especially on poor and vulnerable communities.

- **WCC supports ground-breaking global framework to fight climate change, 20 February 2007**

The World Council of Churches (WCC) has endorsed a ground-breaking climate change statement, fruit of an unprecedented consensus among high-level representatives of the corporate world as well as civil, religious and educational institutions.

This statement is "carefully drafted and urgently needed", wrote WCC General Secretary Rev. Dr Samuel Kobia in a letter endorsing "The Path to Climate Sustainability: A Joint Statement by the Global Roundtable on Climate Change" on behalf of the WCC. The Council "will continue to participate in the process of bringing the concerns this statement addresses to the world", he added.

Endorsed by an unprecedented group of companies and organizations from around the world, the statement calls on governments to set scientifically informed targets for greenhouse gases and carbon dioxide (CO₂) emissions. It also urges them to place a price on carbon emissions and to set forth policies aimed at addressing energy efficiency and de-carbonization in all sectors.

Calling climate change "an urgent problem," the statement lays out a bold, proactive framework for global action to mitigate risks and impacts while also meeting the global need for energy, economic growth and sustainable development. It outlines cost-effective technologies that exist today and others that could be developed and deployed to improve energy efficiency and help reduce CO₂ emissions and other greenhouse gases.

"The Path to Climate Sustainability" statement has been released today at a press conference in New York chaired by Jeffrey D. Sachs, head of the Global Roundtable on Climate Change (GROCC) and director of the Earth Institute at Columbia University.

Endorsements come from critical stakeholders, including leading corporations from all economic sectors to smaller firms with very different perspectives and concerns; they also include an array of civil, religious, environmental, research and educational institutions as well as a distinguished list of world-leading experts from the fields of climate science, engineering, economics and policy studies. [See a list here.]

"The WCC is anxious to encourage large companies like those included in the Global Roundtable to take action in their own businesses and provide leadership in the private sector that will result in limiting the polluting emissions that are causing climate change", said Dr David G. Hallman, advisor of the WCC Climate Change Programme.

- **WCC co-sponsored meeting of church-related relief and development agencies to renew and update common ecumenical advocacy positions and policy in relation to intergovernmental negotiations on climate change, 12-15 April 2007**

Climate change is here to stay; WCC/Christian Aid consultation to explore its links with development

What are the implications of climate change for development in a world where years of development efforts are destroyed in a few seconds or hours by a hurricane or a single

flood? This will be the subject of a 12-15 April 2007 consultation in London hosted by Christian Aid and sponsored by the World Council of Churches (WCC) Working Group on Climate Change.

The consultation is expected to renew and update ecumenical advocacy positions and policy in relation to intergovernmental negotiations on climate change after 2012 – the year when the first commitment period of the Kyoto Protocol expires. It will also review options for faith communities' participation in a proposed global civil society campaign on climate change.

In reflecting from a theological and ethical perspective on the interface between climate change and development, the consultation will consider Northern societies' responsibilities and how Southern societies can pursue their legitimate development goals. Also on the agenda are readaptation strategies as well as emission reduction targets and timetables.

The consultation will hear about plans for a global civil society campaign on climate change that environmental organizations together with faith communities intend to launch later this year.

Some 25 representatives of church-related relief and development agencies will join the members of the WCC climate change group at the consultation.

Participating organizations:

Bread for the World/Church Development Service (Germany)
Christian Aid (UK)
Church of Sweden Aid
Church World Service (USA)
Evangelical Environment Network (USA)
ICCO/Kerkinactie (The Netherlands)
KairosCanada
Norwegian Church Aid
Tearfund (UK)
World Council of Churches Working Group on Climate Change

Churches develop common platform on climate change

Focusing on how to take action to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and contribute to real change in the lives of communities through new forms of development, a 12-15 April WCC/Christian Aid consultation in London worked to determine elements of a common platform for churches' involvement in the UNFCCC COP 13 climate change negotiations in Brazil next November-December.

For the WCC climate change working group, such elements, or benchmarks, relate, for example, to Northern societies' responsibilities in relation to climate change, and how Southern societies can pursue their legitimate development goals.

Consultation participants – representatives of church-related relief and development agencies – also discussed concrete projects to rehabilitate water resources on the slopes of Mt Kenya, churches' involvement in a huge scheme for rainwater harvesting in Brazil, or small projects for renewable energy in India and China.

Convinced that "You reach people's hearts and minds through music," the WCC climate change working group is inviting musicians to compose songs on climate change and earth community to accompany forthcoming activities, like an inter-faith event in Uppsala in November 2008 that will mark the 40th anniversary of the WCC's assembly there in 1968.

- **Statement on the 10th anniversary of the Kyoto Protocol adopted by WCC executive committee, Etchmiadzin, Armenia, 25–28 September 2007**

[Christ] is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation; for in him all things in heaven and on earth were created. (Colossians 1:15)

1. The World Council of Churches took up the problem of climate change in 1992, informed by a mature ecumenical commitment to environmental responsibility. Climate change, with its life-threatening consequences, challenges churches to witness to the integrity of God's creation. It raises economic, political and ethical issues, and demonstrates the brokenness of relationships between God, humankind and creation. Human activity that contributes to climate change is an offence against God who cares for life.
2. The Bible teaches the wholeness of creation: Life is created, sustained and made whole by the power of God's Holy Spirit (Genesis 1; Romans 8). God creates human beings out of the dust of the earth (Genesis 2). Sin breaks relationships among humankind and with the created order (Genesis 3 and 4; Jeremiah 14, Hosea 4:1-3). Bearing the marks of human sin, "creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the children of God" (Romans 8:19). God provided all creatures with the conditions to live life as it is meant to be, in a specific relation towards one another. When creation is threatened by climate change we are called to speak out and act as an expression of our commitment to life, justice and love.
3. Many regions of the world are experiencing drastic changes in rainfall patterns that result in severe droughts and unprecedented floods. Sea levels are rising. Hurricanes, cyclones and typhoons are increasing in strength and frequency, causing loss of life and destruction of the environment and of property. Antarctica, the Arctic, Greenland and mountainous regions are undergoing extraordinary rates of melting due to temperature increases. Those who suffer the most from these events are impoverished and vulnerable communities.

4. Individually and together in the WCC, more and more churches, ecumenical organizations and specialized ministries have taken action concerning climate change. The Ecumenical Patriarchate in Istanbul issued a call to observe September 1 (the beginning of the liturgical year in the Orthodox Church) as creation day and His All Holiness the Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew I, a leader in the field, has organized a series of symposiums such as the recent event in Greenland. The Third European Ecumenical Assembly in Romania this month recommended dedicating a special season of the year to creation, beginning with September 1. From the Pacific Islands to Russia, from Norway to South Africa, churches in all regions have called upon their governments to join the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) and to ratify the Kyoto Protocol. Many including the WCC are working with groups in civil society and with other faith communities. At the Kyoto conference itself, in 1997, an interreligious gathering was held in the Catholic Cathedral of Kyoto with participation of Buddhists, Christians, Hindus, Jews, Muslims and representatives of other religions.
5. Now, ten years after the Kyoto Protocol, there is general agreement that the climate is changing and human activity is a major cause. The UN-sponsored Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), for instance, has determined that increasing emissions of carbon dioxide and other "greenhouse" gases will cause a rise in global mean temperatures of 1.4° to 5.8 °C (compared to pre-industrial levels) by the end of this century.
6. The Kyoto Protocol sets out targets and a schedule for industrialized countries to reduce their greenhouse gas emissions. It is an important first step towards a just and sustainable global climate policy regime. However, in the last ten years, it has become clear that carbon emissions are still far above sustainable levels and still increasing. Much more radical reductions are urgently needed.
7. The Kyoto Protocol came into force only in 2005. 174 countries have now ratified it. However, two major emitters, the USA and Australia, have withdrawn from the Kyoto process. There is also a trend to convert the protocol into a market-based instrument for minimizing economic damage to national economies and business opportunities instead of stressing its purpose of limiting greenhouse gas emissions.
8. After 2012, when the first commitments of the protocol end, a more principle-based approach is essential for achieving an effective and equitable global policy on climate control. Principles that should be taken into account include the principle of equal entitlements to the use of the atmosphere and equal rights to development; the principle of historic responsibility the precautionary principle (prospective responsibility); the principle of priority for the poorest and weakest; and the principle of maximum risk reduction. Some frameworks that lay the groundwork for this principle-based regime already exist, like the Contraction and Convergence and the Greenhouse Development Rights approaches. These invite further deliberations and negotiations.

9. When the Thirteenth Conference of the Parties to the UNFCCC and the Third Session of the Meeting of the Parties to the Kyoto Protocol, meet in Bali, Indonesia, in December 2007, the need for a broader and more radical timetable of action against climate change will be high on the agenda. The Bali conference must make concrete progress in this regard.
10. The need now is for more comprehensive policies to support and promote adaptation and mitigation programmes in countries severely affected by climate change, particularly in the Africa, Caribbean and Pacific regions. Governments in the industrialized countries should significantly increase support for such programmes. Their focus on unqualified economic growth must be transformed, along with their neglect of its destructive effects on people and the environment. They also bear the historic responsibility for high emissions. The WCC dedicates its work to supporting such a transformation.

The executive committee of the World Council of Churches, meeting in Etchmiadzin, Armenia, 25-28 September 2007:

- A. **Reiterates** the concerns of the churches over climate change and its adverse effects on poor and vulnerable communities in many parts of the world;
- B. **Encourages** member churches, specialized ministries and other ecumenical partners to strengthen their commitment and to foster their co-operation with regard to climate change; this requires deeper ethical and theological reflections about the human causes of climate change, exploring interreligious avenues for cooperation and constructive intervention, and ensuring better stewardship of creation in their own actions;
- C. **Supports** the recommendations of the Ecumenical Patriarchate and the Third European Ecumenical Assembly that churches dedicate a special time each year to creation, its care and stewardship;
- D. **Affirms** the basic thrust of the UNFCCC to provide an instrument for a significant reduction of greenhouse gases in order to mitigate human-induced climate change;
- E. **Commemorates** the tenth anniversary of the Kyoto Protocol and celebrates the protocol as an important step forward towards a just and sustainable global climate policy regime;
- F. **Calls** all those countries that have ratified the Kyoto Protocol to fully implement its provisions and those who have not, for example, USA and Australia, to meet targets at least as strict as those included in the protocol;
- G. **Welcomes** the strengthening of the Ecumenical Water Network and its focus on water issues that are directly and indirectly associated with climate change;

H. *Requests* the ecumenical delegation to the Thirteenth Conference of the Parties to the UNFCCC and the Third Session of the Meeting of the Parties to the Kyoto Protocol in Bali in December 2007 to promote an agreement that achieves climate stabilization at 2°C above pre-industrial levels, or less, and to include concerns noted above in its statement.

- **Statement from WCC to the High-Level Ministerial Segment of the 13th Session of the Conference of the Parties – COP13 to the UNFCCC 3rd Session of the Meeting of the Parties to the Kyoto Protocol – CMP3, Nusa Dua, Bali, Indonesia, December 14, 2007**

“This far and no further: Act fast and act now!”

Mr President and fellow participants in this UN Climate Conference:

A change of paradigm is needed

It is our conviction as members of faith communities that a Change of Paradigm from one way of thinking to another is needed if we are to adequately respond to the challenge of climate change. It constitutes a transformation, a “metamorphosis”. This kind of movement just does not happen on its own; it must be catalyzed by agents of change. The world Faiths could be one of those catalysts.

A change in paradigm appears as mandatory in the prevailing economic strategy of promoting endless growth and production of goods and a seemingly insatiable level of consumption among the high-consuming sectors of our societies. Such economic and consumption patterns are leading to the depletion of critical natural resources and to extremely dangerous implications with climate change and development.

Societies must shift to a new paradigm where the operative principles are ethics, justice, equity, solidarity, human development and environmental conservation.

In our traditions, we believe that the earth was entrusted to us but we simply cannot do whatever we want with it. We cannot make use of nature using it only as a commodity. We must bear in mind that our liberty does not allow us to destroy that which sustains life on our planet.

We must act here and now

Much has been said and written about addressing climate change. However, a tangible result is not yet on the horizon. The First Commitment Period within the Kyoto Protocol ends in 2012. Time is running out to reach equitable and sustainable targets for post-2012.

Are we ready as human beings, as members of the global society, as members of our faith communities and our organizations, as sovereign nations, to meet what is expected from us? Or are we going to implement new delays, new strategies to avoid our ethical and

moral duties? In doing so it would be no less than suicidal, jeopardizing the diversity of life in the earth we inhabit, enjoy and share.

It is time to adopt legal mechanisms that adequately respond to the gravity of the situation as documented by the IPCC and which have enforcement provisions with sufficient strength to compel full compliance.

The Statement adopted by the World Council of Churches executive committee on occasion of the “10th anniversary of the Kyoto Protocol”, among other issues, clearly reminds us of our responsibilities and points us toward the future:

- The Kyoto Protocol sets out targets and a schedule for industrialized countries to reduce their greenhouse gas emissions. It is an important first step towards a just and sustainable global climate policy regime. However, in the last ten years, it has become clear that carbon emissions are still far above sustainable levels and still increasing. Much more radical reductions are urgently needed.
- The Kyoto Protocol came into force only in 2005. 175 countries have now ratified it... There is also a trend to convert the protocol into a market-based instrument for minimizing economic damage to national economies and business opportunities instead of stressing its purpose of limiting greenhouse gas emissions.
- After 2012, when the first commitments of the protocol end, a more principle-based approach is essential for achieving an effective and equitable global policy on climate control. Principles that should be taken into account include the principle of equal entitlements to the use of the atmosphere and equal rights to development; the principle of historic responsibility the precautionary principle (prospective responsibility); the principle of priority for the poorest and weakest; and the principle of maximum risk reduction.
- ...the need for a broader and more radical timetable of action against climate change will be high on the agenda. The Bali conference must make concrete progress in this regard.
- The need now is for more comprehensive policies to support and promote adaptation and mitigation programmes in countries severely affected by climate change, particularly in the Africa, Caribbean and Pacific regions.

We have arrived to the point where we know what is causing climate change. We have expressed all our concerns, cleared our doubts and affirmed what took us to the inequitable situation where the poorer carry the burden of the irresponsible waste of resources, energy and extreme consumerism of the richer. It is time now to start taking the positive actions that will lead us to find practical solutions to the problems of the great majority of today's world population.

The eyes of the world are on us. Hundreds of millions of people, women and men, young and aged, have placed their hopes on us. We have to realize that we are kept in their prayers, every one of them following their own religious tradition. And this we cannot forget. Our mission is not to deceive or disappoint them.

Our willing participation in these great changes is required today, now, and not tomorrow. There is no time left for endless words. There must be no more delays. Once more we cry out: “THIS FAR AND NO FURTHER: ACT FAST AND ACT NOW!”

- **Minute on global warming and climate change adopted by WCC central committee, Geneva, Switzerland, 13–20 February 2008**

“Be stewards of God’s creation!”

“In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth...God saw all that he had made, and it was very good” (Genesis 1:1, 31, NIV)

The present minute builds on previous statements of the WCC, especially the statement on the 10th anniversary of the Kyoto Protocol, adopted by the WCC executive committee in September 2007.

1. The scriptures affirm that the “earth is the Lord’s and everything in it” (Psalm 26:1, NIV). In Genesis 1:28, God charges humanity to care for the earth by giving humanity “dominion” over it. The word “dominion” is most appropriately translated as “stewardship”, since humanity is not the master of the earth but steward to responsibly care for the integrity of creation. God wondrously and lovingly created a world with more than enough resources to sustain generations upon generations of human beings and other living creatures. But humanity is not always faithful in its stewardship. Mindless production and excessive consumption by individuals, corporations and countries have led to continuous desecration of creation, including global warming and other forms of climate change.
2. Indigenous peoples all over the world continue to live a respectful way of relating with the environment. The sacred nature of the whole creation is also reflected in different indigenous world-views. While looking at the impact of global warming and climate change, the indigenous peoples’ witness provides inspiration and encouragement.
3. Climate change, as the variation in the earth’s global climate or in regional climates over time, and its effects are being experienced already in many regions of the world. Global warming, i.e. the increase in the average temperature of the earth’s near-surface air and oceans, is one of the most evident aspects of climate change. The average temperature of the earth is rising. This creates the melting of ice sheets in Antarctica and Greenland, glaciers, permafrost in mountainous regions and the rising of the average sea level. Rising sea levels are already affecting some countries like

Bangladesh in Asia and some islands, particularly in the Pacific. A water crisis brought on by severe droughts and unprecedented floods has resulted in a lack of access to safe drinking water and sanitation. Other effects of climate change are hurricanes, cyclones and typhoons, which are increasing in strength, causing loss of life and destruction of the environment and property. Further consequences of climate change are described in the 2007 “Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) Report”. Thus, human life and the whole of creation are suffering a new threat. Climate change raises ecological, social, economic, political and ethical issues, and demonstrates the brokenness of relationships between God, humankind and creation.

4. As stated by the “IPCC Report” and other studies, the situation needs urgent mitigation and adaptation measures in order to prevent further adverse consequences of rising temperatures. Mitigation (dealing with the causes) is a must for developed countries that will have to drastically reduce their carbon dioxide (CO₂) emissions. Adaptation (dealing with the impacts) is urgently needed by developing countries to be able to cope with the changes that are happening. Those who are and will increasingly be affected are the impoverished and vulnerable communities of the global South who are much more dependent on natural resources for their subsistence and do not have the means to adapt to the changes. Deforestation in Africa, Asia and Latin America; the increase in vector-borne diseases (like dengue or malaria) in the higher altitude areas of Africa as a result of the increase in temperature; the forced migration, displacement and resettlement of populations as a result of sea level rise, particularly in the Pacific; are some of the impacts that will continue to increase the pressure on poor and vulnerable communities.
5. To address the threats the world is facing because of climate change, action must be taken now. In December 2007, at the Conference of Parties to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) in Bali, governments agreed on a road map for the negotiation of a new set of commitments under the UNFCCC and the Kyoto Protocol for the post-2012 period. Negotiations are to be concluded by the end of 2009. The United States is now the sole major emitter who has not ratified the Kyoto Protocol. If there is no profound change in life styles, development patterns and the pursuit of economic growth, humanity will not be able to meet the challenge. As the WCC delegation in Bali clearly stressed, “it is our conviction as members of faith communities that a ‘change of paradigm’ from one way of thinking to another is needed if we are to adequately respond to the challenge of climate change”.
6. Climate change is both an environmental issue and a matter of justice. Major greenhouse gas (GHG) emitters have a historic responsibility to assume, to stop and to reverse the current trend. Developing countries, while looking for better conditions for their people, face a dilemma which should be confronted in looking for ways not to repeat the path that led to the present situation. The current unsustainable production and consumption patterns have caused tremendous negative effects in the environment and generated what has been called an ecological debt towards humanity and the earth. This ecological debt can be analyzed in relation to the financial debt.

To reverse this trend it becomes crucial to look for technologies and practices both to mitigate and adapt, especially responding to the needs of vulnerable communities.

7. Churches and religious communities can take key leadership roles in addressing global warming and climate change concerns to individuals, communities and governments. The question we must pose is whether we can rise together to meet this unprecedented opportunity. Churches and religious communities, for example, must find ways to challenge and motivate each other to measure our ecological and economic “footprints” and to follow through by making lasting changes in lifestyles and economic pursuits. Church members have to take responsibility for paying their share of the ecological debt that looms large in the years ahead. Christians should practice “life in all its fullness” (John 10:10) in the face of a modern materialism that has now been globalized. Steps such as these will be a testimony which could permeate societies and be a catalyst for much-needed change.
8. As the effects of global warming can lead to conflict between populations competing over resulted scarce resources, WCC member churches’ actions with regards to climate change should also be seen in relationship with the Decade to Overcome Violence and the lead-up to the International Ecumenical Peace Convocation, scheduled to take place in 2011. The theme of the convocation, “Glory to God and Peace on Earth”, highlights peace on earth, which should include peace with the earth as well as peace among human beings.
9. Many churches, ecumenical organizations and specialized ministries have already started to take action concerning climate change and global warming. The Ecumenical Patriarch has played a leadership role advocating for the care of creation, involving the scientific community, including its concerns in education curricula and calling, on 1 September 1989, to observe September 1st (the beginning of the liturgical year in the Orthodox Church) as creation day. This call was reiterated by the Third European Ecumenical Assembly, meeting in Romania in September 2007. Also in September 2007, the 9th assembly of the Pacific Conference of Churches called on the churches in the Pacific to advocate for “a regional immigration policy giving citizens of countries most affected by climate change (...) rights to resettlement in other Pacific island nations”, and on the global ecumenical family to support this initiative. Forty years after the WCC Uppsala assembly, the Church of Sweden is organizing in Uppsala an interreligious summit on climate change in November 2008.

The central committee of the World Council of Churches, meeting in Geneva, Switzerland, 13-20 February 2008:

- A. ***Urgently calls*** the churches to strengthen their moral stand in relationship to global warming and climate change, recalling its adverse effects on poor and vulnerable communities in various parts of the world, and encourages the churches to reinforce their advocacy towards governments, NGOs, the scientific community and the business sector to intensify cooperation in response to global warming and climate change;

- B. *Calls for* a profound change in the relationship towards nature, economic policies, consumption, production and technological patterns. This change is based on the commitment of Christian communities and institutions, including the WCC, which should strengthen the work of the Ecumenical Centre Ecology Group to continue implementing ecological practices in the Ecumenical Centre in Geneva;
- C. *Encourages* member churches, specialized ministries and other ecumenical partners to:
 - a. share and further develop creative ways of practicing ecologically respectful relationships within the human community and with the earth;
 - b. share knowledge and affordable technology that promote environmentally friendly lifestyles;
 - c. monitor the ecological footprints of individuals, parishes, corporations and states and take other steps to mitigate climate change and global warming;
- D. *Urges* member churches to observe through prayers and action a special time for creation, its care and stewardship, starting on September 1st every year, to advocate for the plight of people and communities of the Pacific, especially in the low lying atolls of Kiribati and Tuvalu, and to find specific ways to show our ecumenical solidarity with those most at risk;
- E. *Requests* theological schools, seminaries and academies to teach stewardship of all creation in order to deepen the ethical and theological understanding of the causes of global warming and climate change and of the sustainable lifestyle that is needed as a response;
- F. *Promotes* the exploration of interreligious and inter-cultural avenues for cooperation and constructive response, such as the interreligious summit planned by the Church of Sweden, ensuring a better stewardship of creation and a common witness through concrete actions.

- **Message from WCC general secretary to the meeting of the Council of the Lutheran World Federation focusing on climate change, 24 June 2008**

Melting snow on Mount Kilimanjaro: a witness of a suffering creation

Welcome one another, just as Christ has welcomed you, to the glory of God (Rom 15:17)

Excellencies and distinguished delegates,

Bishop Hanson, chair, Dr Noko, general secretary,

Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

You are gathering in Tanzania not far from my own home country, Kenya. So let me join all those in welcoming you to Eastern Africa in our own language, Swahili: *Karibu* – come closer and feel at home. The word "welcome" is a poor English equivalent of *Karibu*. For *Karibu* invites someone to come closer for dialogue. The dialogue is about the personal well-being of the immediate subject; but it is also about the health and well-being of the guest's household members. The conversation will also include concerns about the state of one's livestock, and even crops in the field. But that is only the introduction, or the warming up, for dialogue on even deeper matters about life. The whole idea behind *Karibu* is to encourage mutual sharing of both joy and problems. It is also about seeking for solutions to problems together. For that purpose one is called to *Karibia*, to get even closer, and now for a real palaver.

As the LWF Council, I see you doing exactly this for the community you belong to: the churches of the Lutheran World Federation. You are gathering for a real palaver addressing the concerns of your community and its relationships to others. While this will lead you to addressing the concerns of your world-wide communion of churches, you are also ready to listen to your local hosts and to hear more from them about the situation you are facing as signaled by the theme of your meeting: "Melting Snow on Mount Kilimanjaro: A Witness of a Suffering Creation." You could also add: the melting of the ice cap of Mount Kilimanjaro is also witness of a suffering people who are increasingly confronted with the lack of fresh water for themselves, their livestock, and their gardens and fields.

It has been one year since I was invited to speak on World Environment Day to another world wide gathering in Norway on the joint invitation of the Church of Norway and the United Nations Environmental Programme. "Melting ice – a hot topic" was their theme. The thought, of course, first of all of the melting ice of the polar regions and the glaciers in various parts of the world. But it came as a surprise to some of them that I could immediately connect with the theme, thinking of my home country Kenya and of our highest mountain, Mount Kenya, the closest brother to Mount Kilimanjaro.

The meaning (in local languages) of the two mountains' names is the same – the snow-covered glittering mountain. When I grew up, both of these mountains were covered with ice and snow. This was still the case until about fifteen years ago. Today, Mt. Kenya has lost almost all of its ice cap and the glacier covering Mt. Kilimanjaro is also rapidly retreating. Thawing ice has nurtured the steady flow of water in small rivers running down the slopes. First the rivers were polluted due to erosion and pesticides when farmers started to grow coffee and tea higher up on the mountain. Then came the logging that led to accelerated deforestation. Now that the ice cover is gone, the river beds are empty and dry from September to March. They only carry water during the rainy season.

This has devastating consequences for the communities near the rivers. There is not enough water for agriculture and domestic use. The water supply is severely threatened as the rivers dry up. There is already competition for water, pasture and farmland in other areas of Kenya, which sometimes leads to violence. In fact, all over Africa we can see

how water scarcity aggravates existing conflicts and forces people to migrate away from their homes.

The researchers in our universities come to the conclusion that the loss of ice on the two mountains is a result of global warming. We see now that the fossil fuel-based industrialization and affluent life-styles of developed countries have come at a high cost to ecology and people's livelihoods. The majority of the victims are the poor who have not contributed to global warming with the little they need for their daily lives like the people in my home country, Kenya, here in Tanzania or in other places like Bangladesh, or the low-lying islands of the Pacific. The victims are also our future generations in both the developed and the developing nations.

For this reason the WCC has seen climate change as a matter of international and inter-generational justice. We have argued that it is of utmost urgency that people leave the fossil fuel-based development path of highly industrialized countries behind and concentrate fully on renewable energies and sustainable life-styles and production patterns. We are very glad to see that now this is also a priority of the Lutheran World Federation. We will achieve more when we join hands and work together on such an urgent concern for the future of humanity.

This is one of the areas where we can immediately see the benefit of increasing co-operation and common action. To harness our potential, we need to consider carefully what the others are doing while we are setting our own priorities and determining our own programmes. Welcoming what the others are doing and are ready to share with us, this is how we can grow together and strengthen our common witness to the world. The challenge of climate change, like racism and injustice, is too strong for a divided church. We are compelled to come closer to each other and to witness together to God's word of life in Jesus Christ.

Once again *Karibuni*, and I pray that God will bless you with a successful council meeting.

Yours in Christ,
Rev. Dr Samuel Kobia
WCC general secretary

- **Statement from the WCC to the high-level ministerial segment of the 14th Session of the Conference of the Parties – COP14 to the UNFCCC, 4th Session of the Meeting of the Parties to the Kyoto Protocol – CMP4, Poznań, Poland, 12 December 2008**

Faith and feasibility. Responsibly searching for a “new heaven and a new earth”

Mr President,

Distinguished Participants in this United Nations Climate Conference,

Two weeks ago 29 committed leaders from all major faith traditions convened at the Uppsala Interfaith Climate Summit and signed a strong manifesto, which is brought to you as an appendix to this statement. People of different faiths give their support to change governed by justice, equity, solidarity, peace and love.

In December 2007 during our message to the plenary of the High Level Segment of COP13-CMP3 meeting in Bali, Indonesia, the WCC affirmed that as Faith Communities we are convinced a change of paradigm is needed, if the world is to adequately respond to the challenge of climate change. In February this year, the WCC central committee in its *Minute on Global Warming and Climate Change* called for “a profound change in the relationship towards nature, economic policies, consumption, production and technological patterns”. It was added that societies must shift to a new vision where the operative principles are justice, equity, solidarity, human development and care for the environment. And it claimed to the world: “This far and no further: act fast and act now!”

The process towards Copenhagen, started in Bali, must strengthen the commitment of the international community to go beyond the Kyoto Protocol in order to effectively address the threat of global warming.

The journey from COP1 in Berlin in 1995 has been a long one. The WCC has been present in all the UN Climate Conferences around the world, expressing solidarity with victims of climate change, a.o., in African countries and Pacific Island States, who already suffer from increasing droughts, floods and the sea-level rise. We have supported them in their demand for climate justice for all.

Meeting this year in Poznań, we feel the urgency as we think we have only a small ‘window of opportunity’ of less than 10 years in which to stabilize atmospheric concentrations of greenhouse gases, limit atmospheric temperature rise to 2°C and at the same time prevent the most detrimental impacts on nature, societies, economies and development opportunities. But as a Christian fellowship of churches we also do this with faith, because we know the needed changes are possible and believe in the promise of “...a new heaven and a new earth...” (Book of Revelation, 21: 1) where justice, equity, solidarity, peace and love will prevail. As churches, faith is the reason for us to act. We share this inspiration with other faith traditions. Thus the feasibility of adequately addressing climate change depends very much on the political will and consequent decisions this COP will make.

It is our conviction that what is needed for getting negotiations moving and people changing is a convincing argument on the feasibility of climate proof, sustainable societies and lifestyles that will enhance life with dignity. Faith communities have an important role to play.

First and foremost, ambitious politics are needed. As a fellowship of churches, representing more than 500 million people in the world we urge State Parties and the international community to renew, strengthen and deepen their commitment regarding climate change and global warming.

Once again, we affirm the basic thrust of the UNFCCC and the Kyoto Protocol to provide an instrument for a significant reduction of greenhouse gases in order to mitigate human induced climate change. We renew our call for a prompt implementation of the obligations of the Kyoto Protocol as this will give a convincing signal that climate change and responsibilities are taken seriously.

But emissions of carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases are still increasing, which continues to be a matter of alarm. We call governments to take much more radical steps in terms to cut emissions. The signatories of the Uppsala manifesto call for cuts in developed countries by at least 40 per cent by 2020 and 90 per cent by 2050 against 1990 levels. At the same time ambitious quantitative and short term goals for the use of renewable energy are needed.

The issue of adaptation still has been given insufficient attention. This may be attributed to the unwillingness of industrialized countries to accept real responsibility for climate change and to the lack of clarity about the concept of adaptation. Adaptation must be firmly based on human rights. It must include efforts to reduce people's vulnerability and strengthen their strategies to cope with a changing climate and manage and strengthen the local ecosystems that people, to greater or lesser degrees, depend on for their livelihoods. Comprehensive policies and adequate funding for adaptation programmes in countries severely affected by climate change have to be implemented.

A much more principle-based approach is crucial for reaching an effective and equitable global climate policy regime built on the ethical imperatives of justice, equity and solidarity. On a more practical level this pleads for responsibility principles like 'the polluter pays', the precautionary principle, maximum risk reduction and "the polluter changes". Justice and solidarity are interpreted in terms of priority and support for the poorest and those most affected by climate change and the right to sustainable development for those living in poverty and marginalization.

Mr President, distinguished participants,

Once more, as a fellowship of churches, we appeal to you to continue the process in order to reach the unambiguous solution we are expecting. Despite the threat of climate change with a sense of wonder we look at life on planet Earth. It is a miracle and a gift! We all share the responsibility of seeing conscious caretakers of this home of ours. We shall be with you and have you in our prayers, as you already are in the prayers of millions of people around the world.

Act here and act now!

Thank you.

- **Climate change and human rights – churches’ viewpoints, WCC presentation at UN Human Rights Council side event, 16 June 2009**

Delivered by Guillermo Kerber Mas, WCC programme executive – Climate Change

Quite often the news headlines include issues related to climate change. Nowadays governments, politicians, jurists, the academia, the business sector are addressing climate change as one of the most relevant challenges of the present times.

The WCC has been addressing climate change since mid-'80s. In 1988, the Climate Change programme was established, following the reflection and action of the Council since mid-'70s on sustainable communities and since then different activities have expressed the concern of the churches for climate change and global warming.

A relevant aspect of these activities is the work the WCC has carried on towards the UN. In the preparation of the UN Conference on Environment and Development, the Earth Summit in Rio 1992, when the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change was adopted and in successive occasions by its governing bodies and at UN conferences, especially the COPs, the WCC has expressed its policy in relationship to the matter.

The WCC clearly recognized the different dimensions of climate change. Climate change has environmental, political, juridical, economic, social and cultural dimensions.

The different dimensions of climate change became clear, for instance, last April in a meeting of church leaders in the Pacific addressing the challenge of resettlement because of climate change. What will happen to a state, which used to have a territory, if its land one is covered by the rise of sea level (which will be the case of Tuvalu or Kiribati)? What about its sovereignty? What about the cultural identity of its people when they are resettled in groups in different places of a country? What would be the financial implications for a resettlement? These were some of the questions raised at this meeting, where church leaders deepened their awareness of the situation and committed themselves to proactively address climate change, as reflected in the adopted Moana Declaration.

At the same time, the WCC calls for a holistic approach, this is, keeping in mind all these different dimensions and overcoming the threat of reducing climate change approaches to just one aspect.

Taking into account all these different dimensions, from an ethical point of view, for the WCC, it becomes evident that climate change is a matter of justice. Because not all will experience the consequences of climate change in the same way, also because not all are responsible in the same manner for the causes of climate change, mainly CO₂ emissions.

There are, as the (UNFCCC) Convention and the Protocol express, “common but differentiated responsibilities”.

Looking at the justice components of the climate change challenge opens to a thorough consideration of the relationship between climate change and human rights. Still from an ethical point of view, human rights are instruments to do justice. Beyond or perhaps before the sometimes technical considerations that have emerged in the climate change and human rights discussions, an ethical framework, where human rights have indeed a most relevant role to play in, is needed in the negotiations on the deal after the first commitment period of the Kyoto Protocol, which will be discussed in Copenhagen. The relevant studies on climate change and human rights produced by, for instance, Wolfgang Sachs of the Wuppertal Institute and Stephen Humphreys, of the International Council on Human Rights Policy, offer valuable insights to deepen the interaction between climate change and human rights.

Looking at climate change as a justice issue, speaking about climate justice, from the churches' perspective, has its roots in the Bible. The Bible teaches God is a God of Justice. And this God of Justice cares especially for the poor, the “orphan, the widow, the stranger” in the Old Testament categories, and who are at the centre of Jesus' Sermon on the Mount, what can be considered as his programmatic discourse, “Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God”.

Who are the poor, those who will suffer in the hardest way the consequences of climate change? The International Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) 4th assessment report identifies in several sections those who will be more affected by climate change consequences and name them “vulnerable communities”, among them, Indigenous peoples, inhabitants of low coastal areas, the poorest.

These will be, and are already, victims of climate change.

It could be interesting to address Climate change and Human rights also from a victims' rights perspective. When addressing the issue of impunity, in 1997, the French Jurist M Louis Joinet, as independent expert presented at the UN Commission on Human Rights, his report on the “Question of the impunity of perpetrators of human rights violations (civil and political)”¹. The “Joinet report”, as has been later known, refers to civil and political rights, but I would invite you to look at its contents having in mind not only victims of torture, enforced disappearance, rape, arbitrary killings, but also victims of climate change.

The Joinet report proclaimed three principles in relationship to victims' rights:

- (a) The victims' right to know;
- (b) The victims' right to justice; and
- (c) The victims' right to reparations.

1 “Question of the impunity of perpetrators of human rights violations (civil and political)” – Revised final report prepared by M. Louis Joinet (E/CN.4/Sub.2/1997/20/Rev.1). The report can be found at: [http://www.unhcr.ch/huridocda/huridoca.nsf/\(Symbol\)/E.CN.4.sub.2.1997.20.Rev.1.En](http://www.unhcr.ch/huridocda/huridoca.nsf/(Symbol)/E.CN.4.sub.2.1997.20.Rev.1.En)

The **right to know**, points out Joinet, “is not simply the right of any individual victim or closely related persons to know what happened, a right to the truth. The right to know is also a collective right, drawing upon history to prevent violations from recurring in the future. Its corollary is a "duty to remember", which the State must assume, in order to guard against the perversions of history that go under the names of revisionism or “negationism” (Paragraph 17).

What would the right to know mean for victims of climate change? How do we relate this to the right to information? How to overcome negationism / denial?

The **right to justice** “entails obligations for the state: to investigate violations, to prosecute the perpetrators and, if their guilt is established, to punish them. Although the decision to prosecute is initially a State responsibility, supplementary procedural rules should allow victims to be admitted as civil plaintiffs in criminal proceedings or, if the public authorities fail to do so, to institute proceedings themselves” (Paragraph 27).

Under this perspective what would be the contents of the “historic responsibility” – recognized by the UNFCCC, of industrialized countries in relation to CO2 emissions and global warming?

The **right to reparation** entails both individual measures and general, collective measures and should cover all injuries suffered by victims and embraces three kinds of action²:

- (a) Restitution (seeking to restore victims to their previous state);
- (b) Compensation (for physical or mental injury, including lost opportunities, physical damage, defamation and legal aid costs); and
- (c) Rehabilitation (medical care, including psychological and psychiatric treatment). (*cf. Paragraphs 40 – 42*).

I think these three points are quite relevant to victims of climate change as well.

The Joinet Report, drafted in 1997 has been reaffirmed in the Updated Set of principles drafted by Prof. Diane Orentlicher in 2005³.

To summarize, the WCC has an ethical approach to climate change, which highlights the justice component of climate change challenges. From this perspective, human rights have a relevant role to play to make justice prevail in the international arena. While addressing climate change and human rights from an ethical perspective, the Christian churches raise the concern for the most vulnerable communities, the victims of climate

2 Joinet quotes here Theo van Boven’s report on “Basic principles and guidelines on the Right to Reparation for Victims of Gross Violations of Human Rights and Humanitarian Law”, (E/CN.4/Sub.2/1996/17). We will come back to this report later.

3 In the 2005 Human Rights Commission in Geneva, Prof. Diane Orentlicher, presented her report and an “Updated Set of principles for the protection and promotion of human rights through action to combat impunity” (E/CN.4/2005/102/Add.1) which “largely affirms and preserves the Principles as they were proposed by the Sub-Commission in 1997 while reflecting relevant developments” (E/CN.4/2005/102, para 4). See also Diane Orentlicher’s “Report of the independent expert to update the Set of Principles to combat impunity” (E/CN.4/2005/102).

change, whose rights should be respected, promoted and defended as the international community addresses the challenges and threats of climate change.

- **Statement on eco-justice and ecological debt adopted by WCC central committee, Geneva, Switzerland, 26 August–2 September 2009**

“Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors” (Matthew 6:12)

1. The era of “unlimited consumption” has reached its limits. The era of unlimited profit and compensation for the few must also come to an end. Based on a series of ecumenical consultations and incorporating the perspectives of many churches, this statement proposes the recognition and application of a concept that expresses a deep moral obligation to promote ecological justice by addressing our debts to peoples most affected by ecological destruction and to the earth itself. It begins with expressing gratitude to God, whose providential care is manifested in all God’s creation and the renewal of the earth for all species. Ecological debt includes hard economic calculations as well as incalculable biblical, spiritual, cultural and social dimensions of indebtedness.
2. The earth and all of its inhabitants are currently facing an unprecedented ecological crisis, bringing us to the brink of mass suffering and destruction for many. The crisis is human-induced, caused especially by the agro-industrial-economic complex and culture of the global North, which is characterized by the consumerist lifestyles of the elites of the developed and developing worlds and the view that development is commensurate with exploitation of the earth’s “natural resources”. What is being labelled and co-modified, as “natural resources” is all of creation – a sacred reality that ought not to be co-modified. Yet the Northern agro-industrial-economic complex, especially in the current era of market globalization, has used human labour and resourcefulness, as well as the properties of other life forms, to produce wealth and comfort for a few at the expense of the survival of others and their dignity.
3. Churches have been complicit in this history through their own consumption patterns and through perpetuating a theology of human rule over the earth. The Christian perspective that has valued humanity over the rest of creation has served to justify the exploitation of parts of the earth community. Yet, human existence is utterly dependant on a healthy functioning earth system. Humanity cannot manage creation. Humanity can only manage their own behaviour to keep it within the bounds of earth’s sustenance. Both the human population and the human economy cannot grow much more without irreversibly endangering the survival of other life forms. Such a radical view calls for a theology of humility and a commitment on the part of the churches to learn from environmental ethics and faith traditions that have a deeper sense of an inclusive community.
4. The churches’ strength lies in its prophetic witness to proclaim God’s love for the whole world and to denounce the philosophy of domination that threatens the

manifestation of God's love. The biblical prophets had long ago deduced the intrinsic connection between ecological crises and socio-economic injustice, railing against the elites of their day for the exploitation of peoples and the destruction of ecosystems (Jeremiah 14: 2-7, Isaiah 23: 1-24 and Revelations 22). Based on Jesus' commandment of love, as expressed in his life and parables, the World Council of Churches (WCC) must broaden its understanding of justice and the boundaries of who our neighbours are. For many years, the WCC has called for the cancellation of illegitimate external financial debts claimed from countries of the South based on the biblical notion of jubilee (Leviticus 23). It has taken a step further in addressing the ecological dimension of economic relationships.

5. Beginning with the articulation of the ideas of "limits to growth" in a Church and Society consultation held in Bucharest in 1974 and "sustainable societies" at the 1975 Nairobi assembly, the WCC has been working deeply on ecological justice for over three decades. At the 1998 Harare assembly, the harmful impacts of globalization on people and the environment came to the fore through the Alternative Globalization Addressing People and earth (AGAPE) process, leading to the ongoing study process on Poverty, Wealth and Ecology. As an offshoot of these important ecumenical reflections and actions, the WCC, in partnership with churches and civil society organizations in Southern Africa, India, Ecuador, Canada and Sweden, initiated work on ecological debt in 2002.
6. Ecological debt refers to damage caused over time to ecosystems, places and peoples through production and consumption patterns; and the exploitation of ecosystems at the expense of the equitable rights of other countries, communities or individuals. It is primarily the debt owed by industrialized countries in the North to countries of the South on account of historical and current resource plundering, environmental degradation and the disproportionate appropriation of ecological space to dump greenhouse gases (GHGs) and toxic wastes. It is also the debt owed by economically and politically powerful national elites to marginalized citizens; the debt owed by current generations of humanity to future generations; and, on a more cosmic scale, the debt owed by humankind to other life forms and the planet. It includes social damages such as the disintegration of indigenous and other communities.
7. Grounded on an overriding priority for the impoverished and a deep moral responsibility to rectify injustices, ecological debt lenses reveal that it is the global South who is the principal ecological creditor while the global North is the principal ecological debtor. The ecological debt of the global North arises from various causal mechanisms whose impact has been intensified in the current economic crisis.
8. Under the current international financial architecture, countries of the South are pressured through conditions for loans as well as multilateral and bilateral trade and investment agreements to pursue export-oriented and resource-intensive growth strategies. Ultimately it fails to account for the costs of erosion of ecosystems and increasing pollution. Many mega-development projects (e.g. dams) in countries of the South are financed through foreign lending by international financial institutions in collaboration with undemocratic and corrupt local leaders and elites, without the informed consent of local inhabitants and with little consideration of the projects'

ecological and social consequences. Moreover, industrialized Northern countries make disproportionate use of ecological space without adequate compensation, reparation or restitution. Northern countries' ecological footprint (an approximate measurement of human impacts on the environment) presently averages 6.4 ha/person. This is more than six times heavier than the footprint of Southern countries at an average of 0.8 ha/person.

9. Human-induced climate change heightens the relationship of North-South inequity even further. Industrialized countries are mainly responsible for GHG emissions causing climate change (though emerging economies in the South are becoming major contributors to global GHG emissions in absolute terms). Yet, research indicates that the South will bear a bigger burden of the adverse effects of climate change including the displacement of people living in low-lying coastal areas and small island states; the loss of sources of livelihood, food insecurity, reduced access to water and forced migration.
10. In the light of biblical teaching (cf. Matthew 6:12), we pray for repentance and forgiveness, but we also call for the recognition, repayment and restitution of ecological debt in various ways, including non-market ways of compensation and reparation, that go beyond the market's limited ability to measure and distribute.
11. The central committee of the WCC recognizes the need for a drastic transformation at all levels in life and society in order to end the ecological indebtedness and restoring right relationships between peoples and between people and the earth. This warrants a re-ordering of economic paradigms from consumerist, exploitive models to models that are respectful of localized economies, indigenous cultures and spiritualities, the earth's reproductive limits, as well as the right of other life forms to blossom. And this begins with the recognition of ecological debt.

While affirming the role of churches to play a critical role in lifting up alternative practices, as well as building the necessary political will and moral courage to effect urgent transformations, the central committee of the WCC meeting in Geneva, Switzerland, 26 August – 2 September 2009:

- A. ***Calls*** upon WCC member churches to urge Northern governments, institutions and corporations to take initiatives to drastically reduce their greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions within and beyond the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), which stipulates the principles of historical responsibility and "common, but differentiated responsibilities" (CDR), according to the fixed timelines set out by the UNFCCC report of 2007.
- B. ***Urges*** WCC member churches to call their governments to adopt a fair and binding deal, in order to bring the CO₂ levels down to less than 350 parts per million (ppm), at the Conference of Parties (COP 15) of the UNFCCC in Copenhagen in December 2009, based on climate justice principles, which include effective support to vulnerable communities to adapt to the consequences of climate change through adaptation funds and technology transfer.
- C. ***Calls upon*** the international community to ensure the transfer of financial resources to countries of the South to keep petroleum in the ground in fragile environments and

preserve other natural resources as well as to pay for the costs of climate change mitigation and adaptation based on tools such as the Greenhouse Development Rights (GDR) Framework.

- D. ***Demands*** the cancellation of the illegitimate financial debts of Southern countries, most urgently for the poorest nations, as part of social and ecological compensations, not as official development assistance.
- E. ***Recommends*** that WCC member churches learn from the leadership of Indigenous Peoples, women, peasant and forest communities who point to alternative ways of thinking and living within creation, especially as these societies often emphasize the value of relationships, of caring and sharing, as well as practice traditional, ecologically respectful forms of production and consumption.
- F. ***Encourages*** and supports WCC member churches in their advocacy campaigns around ecological debt and climate change, mindful of the unity of God's creation and of the need for collaborative working between Southern and Northern nations. Specifically ***supports*** the activities of churches in countries that are suffering from climate change.
- G. ***Calls*** for continued awareness-building and theological reflection among congregations and seminary students on a new cosmological vision of life, eco-justice and ecological debt through study and action, deeper ecumenical and inter-faith formation, and through the production and dissemination of relevant theological and biblical study materials.
- H. ***Urges*** WCC member churches and church institutions to conduct ecological debt audits in partnership with civil society, including self-assessment of their own consumption patterns. Specifically, the WCC should establish a mechanism to provide for recompense of ecological debt incurred by its gatherings, and to collect positive examples of ecological debt recognition, prevention, mitigation, compensation, reparation and restitution in partnership with civil society groups and movements.
- I. ***Calls*** for deepening dialogue on ecological debt and the building of alliances with ecumenical, religious, economic and political actors and between the churches in Southern and Northern countries.
- J. ***Stresses*** the importance of accompanying ongoing struggles and strategically linking and supporting the efforts of peasant, women's, youth and indigenous peoples' movements through the World Social Forum and other avenues to design alternative compensation proposals, as well as to avoid amassing more ecological debt.
- K. ***Calls*** upon WCC member churches through their advocacy work to encourage their governments to work for the recognition of the claims of ecological debt, including the cancellation of illegitimate financial debts.
- L. ***Calls*** upon WCC member churches to deepen their campaigns on climate change by including climate debt and advocating for its repayment by applying the ecological debt framework.

- M. *Calls* upon WCC member churches to advocate for corporate social accountability within international and national legal frameworks and to challenge corporations and international financial institutions to include environmental liabilities in their accounts and to take responsibility for the policies that have caused ecological destruction.
- N. *Calls* upon WCC member churches to support community-based sustainable economic initiatives, such as producer cooperatives, community land trusts and bio-regional food distributions.
- O. *Encourages* churches all over the world to continue praying for the whole of creation as we commemorate on 1 September this year the 20th anniversary of the encyclical of His All Holiness the Ecumenical Patriarch Dimitrios I, establishing the day of the protection of the environment, God's creation.

- **Letter of concern from WCC general secretary to the members of the Greenland Dialogue calling for the inclusion of an equity dimension in any forthcoming Copenhagen agreement, 14 September 2009**

Your Excellency,

The World Council of Churches has been following climate change negotiations since the late 1980s and the creation of the UNFCCC. It is with deep concern we observe the lack of progress in the present climate talks under the convention, and we are therefore following with interest outcomes of climate talks in other international fora.

We understand that you are invited to attend the next session of the Greenland Dialogue, initiated by the Danish government, to promote climate change negotiations leading up to COP15. We are happy to note that the dialogue so far has been taken forward in a good and constructive spirit and we hope that the meeting in New York will be fruitful.

The World Council of Churches is a fellowship of churches with members from around the world. Our deep concern for the most vulnerable countries and peoples compel us to raise some concerns for those attending the Greenland Dialogue.

- Any initiative taken to promote progress in global climate change negotiations is strongly needed. However, we want to stress the importance of linking back to the UNFCCC process, to ensure that decisions are taken within the UN where all parties have a voice and the possibility of influencing the process. We are especially concerned about the voice of the most vulnerable developing countries. These are the countries most affected by the impact of climate change, but with least influence in the political arena. We are aware that the Greenland Dialogue includes parties from both Annex 1 and non-Annex 1, as well as parties coming from the AOSIS and the LDC group. However, the majority of countries still stand outside the dialogue and progress made in New York can therefore not be shifted to UNFCCC without a broader discussion within the UNFCCC framework.

- As an ecumenical family we call for the inclusion of an equity dimension in any forthcoming Copenhagen agreement. Equity is crucial to ensure possibilities for development and economic progress in all countries. We believe that any effort for a sharing mechanism in a forthcoming agreement should be based on the concepts of capacity and historic responsibility. A development threshold ensuring that the poorest people have a right to development under future commitment periods of a global climate change regime is also critical.
- Finance is a key area that needs addressing in the current climate change negotiations. Without a predictable, adequate and a sustainable financial mechanism, any agreement will lack resources for implementation. Considering the urgent need for funds, not only for the future but also for the immediate needs for adaptation in many vulnerable countries, clear commitments are needed from the Annex 1 countries.

We hope that the crucial talks in New York, in the Greenland Dialogue and in the UN General Assembly, will be fruitful and that you can bring the outcome with you back to the negotiations within the UNFCCC.

Yours sincerely,
 Rev. Dr Samuel Kobia
 General secretary

• **Letter from WCC general secretary to WCC members churches, REOs, CWCs, Specialized Ministries and IEOs, encouraging practical actions to express the commitment of Christian churches and the whole ecumenical movement to care for creation, 15 September 2009**

Dear sisters and brothers in Christ,

“Grace and peace to you from God our Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ” (Romans 1: 7) Warm greetings from Geneva!

Climate change has become one of the most serious challenges facing humanity today. Changes in rainfall patterns, severe droughts, unprecedented floods, increases in strength and frequency of hurricanes, cyclones and typhoons, the meltdown of glaciers and ice in Antarctica and Arctic are some of the expressions of this crisis. The poor and vulnerable communities and states are those who are already suffering the most. Churches and regional ecumenical organizations are responding in different ways.

The meeting of the Conference of Parties (COP) of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, taking place December 2009 in Copenhagen, is crucial as the international community will have to agree on a new deal after 2012, the end of the first commitment period of the Kyoto Protocol.

The World Council of Churches has been addressing the challenges of climate change for decades. In 1988 the Climate Change programme was created building on the work on sustainable communities developed since the mid-1970s. In recent years the WCC's policy has been expressed through the *Statement on the 10th Anniversary of the Kyoto Protocol* (adopted by the WCC executive committee in September 2007), the *Minute on Global Warming and Climate Change* (adopted by the WCC central committee in February 2008) and the *Statement on Eco-Justice and Ecological Debt* (adopted by the WCC central committee earlier this month), as well as through statements presented at COPs.

Following the calls of the WCC statements I would like to encourage you and your churches to take some practical actions as a way to express the commitment of Christian churches and the whole ecumenical movement and as symbols of our care for creation.

- **Join “Countdown to Copenhagen” and take the pledge**

Together with churches and specialized ministries, the WCC is involved in the Countdown to Copenhagen campaign. The campaign calls for a fair and just deal on climate change in COP 15. By taking the pledge you express your belief in a world free from poverty and injustice and your willingness in helping transforming the world. For signing the pledge see www.countdowntocopenhagen.org

- **Ring the bells of your churches 350 times on 13 December 2009, 3 p.m. local time**

The number 350 refers to 350 ppm (parts per million), the maximum limit of CO₂ emissions if we are to avoid climate disaster. At the present moment the world levels of CO₂ emissions are at 387 ppm. It is therefore imperative that the COP15 summit reaches a radical, unequivocal and binding agreement on how to attain this goal. December 13 will mark the height of the COP15 climate negotiations in Copenhagen. At 3 p.m. Copenhagen local time, after a high profile ecumenical celebration at the Lutheran Cathedral, the Church of Our Lady, hosted by the National Council of Churches in Denmark, the bells of the cathedral will ring 350 times. Churches all over the world are invited to join this event by ringing their bells 350 times at 3 p.m. local time. We would very much appreciate if you let us know that you will be joining this bell ringing by registering through www.bellringing350.org.

- **Pray together with Christians all over the world during the Time for Creation (September 1 – October 4)**

Time for Creation, as proposed by the Third European Ecumenical Assembly in Sibiu in 2007, starts on 1 September, the beginning of the liturgical year in the Orthodox Church and is the day for protection of the environment as proposed by the Ecumenical Patriarch. The time ends 4 October, the commemoration of Saint Francis of Assisi. During the Time for Creation, Christians are called to pray for the whole creation, for the people most affected by climate change and for sustainable lifestyles. This year, the WCC invites you to pray specially for the peoples and churches in the Pacific. Resource prayers are available in the WCC website: <http://www.oikoumene.org/climatechange>.

- **Join others in your community, in your country who, through different ways are responding to the call of caring for creation and addressing climate change**

See, for instance the Tck, tck, tck campaign, <http://tcktcktck.org>, in which the WCC takes part.

You can find more information on all of the above on the WCC website on “Countdown to Climate Justice” (<http://www.oikoumene.org/climatechange>). We are looking forward to your involvement in these actions. I pray the Holy Spirit guides our feet to become faithful disciples of Jesus Christ.

Yours in Christ,
Rev. Dr Samuel Kobia
General secretary

- **The global economic crisis: effects and policy responses, immediate challenges related to debt and climate change, Hearing with civil society and the private sector at the fifty-sixth session of the UNCTAD Trade and Development Board, 16 September 2009**

Presentation by Guillermo Kerber, WCC programme executive – Climate Change

- Climate change and global warming are, indeed, one of the most important challenges the world is facing today. Populations and especially vulnerable communities in different parts of the world, e.g. in the low atoll islands of the Pacific, in the Great Lakes and the Horn of Africa and in the Caribbean, are threatened by the consequences of climate change and global warming.
- Climate change has environmental, political, juridical, economic, social, cultural and spiritual dimensions. Climate change should be addressed from a **holistic approach**, this is, keeping in mind all these different dimensions and overcoming the threat of reducing climate change approaches to just one aspect. There have been attempts, indeed, to reduce the climate change crisis for instance, to the environmental, the political or the economic aspect.
- Taking into account all these different dimensions, from an ethical point of view, it becomes evident that climate change is a **matter of justice**. Because not all will experience the consequences of climate change in the same way, also because not all are responsible in the same manner for the causes of climate change, mainly CO₂ emissions. There are, as the UNFCCC Convention expresses, “common but differentiated responsibilities and respective capabilities”. Impoverished and most vulnerable communities and states are and will be affected the most and do not have the means to adapt to climate change effects.

- The **current development pattern** with the prevailing economic strategy of promoting endless growth and production of goods and the high consumption lifestyles of the richer industrialized nations and wealthy elites throughout the world has led to the depletion of critical natural resources with life-threatening consequences for impoverished nations, low-lying island states, and future generations. The responses to the financial and economic crisis by the rich nations have, unfortunately, followed the same pattern. The economic crisis has been a missed opportunity to have an in depth reform of the global financial architecture and a paradigm shift in development pattern.
- The recognized historic responsibility of industrialized countries (Annex I countries in the Kyoto Protocol) has also to deal with a **climate debt**, in the broader framework of ecological debt. While discussions at the global level have addressed a debt moratorium or cancellation, many times the climate debt, which has been accumulated over the centuries against vulnerable peoples, future generations and all of creation, is often overlooked.
- To respond to the climate debt, on the one hand, rich countries have to drastically reduce CO2 emissions (mitigate) to have a global maximum of 350 ppm, in order to keep global warming below 2 degrees Celsius. At the same time, they should implement specific financial support packages to contribute to the adaptation of developing countries to the effects of climate change. These payments must not be taken from existing aid budgets but should be added to the 0.7 %. Developing countries, while facing the challenge to eradicate poverty, should look for sustainable ways of development to limit their own emissions.
- Because of the climate change crisis, any initiative taken to promote progress in the global negotiations is strongly needed. This should be linked to the UNFCCC process, and to ensure that **decisions are taken within the UN** where all parties have a voice and a possibility to influence the process.
- An **ambitious, fair and binding agreement** should be reached in COP 15 in Copenhagen. To do so, industrialized countries need to lead the global effort, first of all by living up to the commitments already made under the Kyoto Protocol on climate finance, technology transfer and emission reduction targets. Second – in the case of the United States – by showing real willingness to re-engage with the global community in their struggle to limit climate change.
- This agreement should include a clear **equity dimension**. Equity is crucial to ensure possibilities for development and economic progress in all countries. Any effort for a sharing mechanism should be based on the capacity and historic responsibility, as well as a development threshold ensuring that the poorest people have a right for development also under future commitment periods of a global climate change regime.

- A key area being addressed in the current climate change negotiations is **finance**.
- Without a predictable, adequate and sustainable financial mechanism of implementation, any agreement will lack resources for implementation. Considering the urgent need for funds, not only for the future but also for the immediate needs for adaptation in many vulnerable countries, clear commitments are needed from the Annex 1 countries.
- With no doubt, **the financial and economic crisis has also had consequences in the climate change negotiations**. Countries and regions who were at the forefront of commitments for the post 2012 regime have used the crisis as an excuse to express their incapacity to match pledges made beforehand.
- There are, nevertheless, **opportunities**. Next week Climate Change Summit in New York and COP 15 in Copenhagen in December will witness how much the international community and especially industrialized countries care about climate change.
- **Statement from the WCC to the high-level ministerial segment of the 15th Session of the Conference of the Parties – COP15 – to the UNFCCC and the 5th Session of the Meeting of the Parties to the Kyoto Protocol – CMP5, Copenhagen, Denmark, 18 December 2009**

A sign of hope for the future for people of good will

Mr President,
Distinguished Delegates to this United Nations Climate Change Conference,
Dear Sisters and Brothers,

Since long ago, we, as members of the world civil society promised to take the lead in establishing just, participatory and sustainable societies. The present day reality shows that our sincere efforts have not been enough to bring in the age of social justice and peace. On the contrary, our most vulnerable communities are at stake, as well as the rest of the world, threatened by the impact of the already evident effects of climate change.

As we declared during COP13-CMP3 in Bali, Indonesia, in 2007, a change of paradigm is imperative. We must do it here and now. We must transform ourselves: transform our communities, transform our societies, transform the world, and in this meeting transform our politics, as a basis for our worldwide actions to save our planet from the catastrophic and suicidal consequences of climate change.

As people of faith we beg and urge you to journey together on the basis of unilateral ambitious, convincing and trust building moves in order to speed up the global process

toward a visible and verifiable improvement of life on earth in every continent, in every country, in every place.

In view of the need of trust-building steps we ask you to admit to be aware that all countries at some moments fail in mutual understanding, sensitivity and love. We ask you to confess that as a negotiation tactic every country tends to persist in denying its own faults while pointing a splinter in its neighbours' eyes, using all means and possible occasions to claim its own moral superiority. We ask you to transform international politics by overcoming these weaknesses, for the future of humankind and the earth as we know it.

We recognize that the threats of climate change are ever-growing. Yet we do not pay adequate attention to the warning bells the scientific community has raised. We need to ACT now. The Copenhagen global agreement is and should be a call to immediate action. Moreover, we firmly believe the Copenhagen agreement is and should be a sign of hope for the future; a sign of hope for humanity, and for the continuation of life on planet earth, our common home.

We said it is a sign of hope for the future. But the future has already reached us: the future is here, the future is now. The end of the 1st Commitment Period under the Kyoto Protocol in 2012 will mark the 40th anniversary of the Stockholm Conference! By 2012 humanity will have spent four decades trying to arrive to a consensus on how and when to correct our misuse of the earth's natural non-renewable resources. The time is now to take decisions that will guarantee that in 2012 we have *implemented* an adequate answer to the worries that were raised in 1972!

It will be a subject of justice and wisdom towards our planet and the entire good creation of God, to see the same promptness from the global community in responding to the climate change crisis, as the way in which it dealt with the financial and economic crisis. It is like people say: never waste a good crisis.

The "Countdown to Copenhagen" has finally come to its end. Distinguished Delegates, the world, the people that gave you the power to find a solution to this intricate and multifaceted problem, expect the result of your arduous negotiations along these last years. The result we expect must be imbedded in justice, equity, solidarity, ethics and love: love for you yourselves, for your families, for your neighbour, for your offspring and for our life-sustaining planet.

We have a hope and the sign of hope we foresee is a Copenhagen global agreement we are expecting to receive from you today. Do not deceive us. It will be a sign of hope for the future, and it will bring peace on earth to people of good will, today and for the years to come. We are all members of one family living together, breathing together, and dreaming together.

Dreaming a better world for all is possible.

Do not be afraid! Act now!

Thank you very much.

- **WCC acting general secretary calls for reform of international financial institutions following the resignation of World Bank president, Paul Wolfowitz, 18 May 2007**

The nature of the current leadership change at the World Bank (resignation of World Bank President Paul Wolfowitz) is a timely reminder of the need for reform in how international financial institutions are governed. The democratic deficit in the selection of key leaders must be redressed. Reforms that ensure a greater representation and more effective voice for the developing countries must be set in place now. Future leaders should be chosen not with out-dated procedures but with rules that more closely reflect the international common good. This concern is one of the issues of accountability and transparency raised in discussions between the World Council of Churches, the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund in recent years.

Dr William Temu
WCC acting general secretary

- **Statement on linking poverty, wealth and ecology in Africa, Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, 5-9 November 2007**

Alternative Globalization Addressing People and Earth (AGAPE) consultation on linking poverty, wealth and ecology: Africa ecumenical perspectives

Preamble

We, African people of faith, youth, women, men, activists, theologians and church leaders, in the spirit of community and critical discernment, have convened in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, from 05-09 November 2007 to:

- Share the perspectives of women and youth on the links between poverty, wealth and ecology in the context of Africa;
- Develop African theological bases for studying these issues; and
- Formulate ecumenical strategies and actions for addressing the interlinked problems of poverty, excessive wealth, and ecological degradation in Africa as part of the AGAPE process.

Linking poverty, wealth and ecology in Africa

Africa is endowed with rich communities of people, bountiful resources and diverse ecology. Yet:

- African children die of hunger, malnutrition and preventable diseases because of neoliberal trade policies and patent systems that force Africa to **produce** cash crops for export and that refuse poor people access to medicines and healthcare.

- Young people are denied the right to education and forced to migrate to unfriendly lands by debt conditionalities that oblige governments to privatize educational systems.
- Women die in childbirth, are pushed into insecure work in the informal economy, and are trafficked into new forms of slavery because of desperate economic conditions produced by systemic trade deficits, external indebtedness and structural adjustment.
- African men, deprived of the dignity of decent work by neoliberal economic policies, are driven to violence and war over resources.
- African communities are forced away from their land and blocked off from the basics of life by multinational resource extractive industries and the construction of mega-dams.
- Africa's monetary wealth continues to flow out of the continent in the form of debt and interest payments, profit repatriation of multinational corporations and capital flight.
- The ecological fabric of Africa – the source and means to life, food, water, fuel and medicine – is systematically destroyed to fuel production for production's sake and to sustain the consumerist lifestyles of rich, northern countries.

We have come to the crucial recognition that impoverishment, enrichment and ecological destruction are interlinked. Transatlantic slavery and 500 years of colonialism, had instituted a system of plunder of human and natural resources that enriched colonial powers at the cost of decimating and dehumanizing African people. Moreover, the current context of neoliberal economic globalization, in complicity with patriarchal structures and militarization, has further undermined African sovereignty, wresting away African people's communal ownership and control over productive means, natural and biotic resources. In concentrating these resources, especially capital, in the hands of powerful nations, international financial institutions and multinational corporations working in collusion with African elites – the agents of empire – the socio-economic disparities between Africa and rich nations continue to widen at alarming rates. Driven by motives of endless economic expansion and profit maximization – rather than provisioning for life and care of community and ecology – neoliberal models of wealth creation are threatening the entire web of life.

We, therefore:

- Denounce neoliberal economic globalization;
- Remind the countries of the North of the wealth that was built and sustained on the continued extraction and plunder of Africa's resources as well as on the exploitation of African people;
- Reclaim African communities' sovereignty over decision-making processes, productive means and resources; and
- Affirm that African people are creditors of a tremendous economic, socio-cultural, and ecological debt.

Theological bases of linking poverty, wealth and ecology

God has created the household of life (*oikos*) and human beings to live in community with one another (Psalm 115:16 and Genesis 1-2). We are created in God's own image and likeness and have the responsibility to take care of God's good creation. The Christian notion of *oikos* resonates with the African understanding of *ubuntu / botho / uzima* (life in wholeness) and *ujamaa* (life in community). They embrace among others, the values of fullness of life, full participation in all life processes including in the economy and ecology. It further entails the just care, use, sharing and distribution of resources and elements of life. Where the above and life-affirming relationships have been violated, the institution of restorative, redistributive and rectificatory (wisdom) justice are necessary. These principles of justice, reparation, restoration and reconciliation, forgiveness, mutual love and dignity for all God's creation ought to be promoted ecumenically as bases for constructive critique of global capitalism, which increasingly violates life-in-abundance (John 10:10).

We confess that the churches, understood as the body of Christ, have not been faithful in bearing just witness to the questions of justice in the economy, ecology and relationships amongst the peoples. Churches have often neglected to challenge the death-dealing effects of the degradation of God's creation and the unjust sharing of God's resources. This failure to address the structural sins of greed, exploitation, racism, dehumanization and inequitable sharing of power which persist in economy and ecology, results in trivialization of poverty where the poor are blamed for their plight.

Churches have not always offered balanced theologies and praxes on stewardship of (or caring for) life. They have often promoted narrow perspectives which place ecological issues at the periphery of daily life and have neglected to proclaim in truth the promised wholesome abundance for all (John 8:32). God calls us to care for creation (Psalm 148), requiring a new understanding which affirms that caring for creation is mandatory, not optional.

Churches have not adequately exercised their prophetic call to challenge people, companies, institutions and countries which are the benefactors and beneficiaries of neoliberal economic globalization.

If we affirm ourselves to be a worldwide community that respects and honors the web of life and human dignity, the life-denying relationships and practices which create poverty in the midst of wealth and dehumanize people must be challenged.

We, therefore, call upon churches to bear prophetic witness to:

- Speak truth to power (Amos 8:4-6) and condemn systems of domination in relations, international trade and debt systems that enslave people (Nehemiah 5);
- Criticize greed as the cause and manifestation of empire (Isaiah 5:7-10). We understand the empire to mean "the convergence of economic, political, cultural, military and religious power, in a system of domination that imposes the flow of benefits from the vulnerable to the powerful. Empire crosses all boundaries, distorts identities, subverts cultures, subordinates nations-states, and either marginalize or co-

opts religious communities" (World Alliance of Reformed Churches 2005/6). Greed violates wholeness that God created and expects. It also contradicts *ubuntu / botho / ujamaa* which affirm dignity and wholeness in community (*uzima*).;

- Remind the world that greed cuts off individuals, communities, and whole countries from the richness of life (Matthew 5) and *ubuntu*;
- Condemn the imperial ideologies and praxes that present neoliberal economic globalization as the only way of life, denying the ecological and human diversity that exist in life; and
- Condemn patriarchal collusion with injustices in the economy and ecology.

We, therefore, declare:

- Structures of domination and exploitation based on class, gender, race / ethnicity are sinful; and
- Greed and its negative manifestations (as stated above), overproduction and over-consumption are sinful and require radical transformation (*metanoia*).

This is the *kairos* – a moment for change and repentance, reparations, justice, forgiveness, reconciliation, wellbeing and peace. Radical transformation derives power and inspiration from the seeds of hope rooted in African heritage and spirituality; and requires us to re-envision and recreate life in the context of these challenges.

Seeds of hope

In building creative and practical alternatives to, and resisting the neoliberal economic paradigm, we obtain immense hope and inspiration from:

- The spiritualities and theologies of life that place community, sharing, justice and care of life and creation at the centre;
- The ecumenical movement's historical engagement for justice, peace and integrity of creation;
- African liberation and justice-seeking movements that continue to work for freedom from colonial and neo-colonial powers; and
- Social movements in Africa of peoples struggling for life and dignity – especially youth and women's movements – that are mobilizing women and men for just wages and decent work; defending food sovereignty; responding to the HIV-AIDS pandemic and other epidemics; demanding accountability from their governments and multinational corporations; resisting mining and logging activities; and advocating at the international and national levels for just trade and debt cancellation.

Towards metanoia (radical transformation)

We invite and challenge Church and society, ecumenical partners, and our brothers and sisters in the North to:

- Acknowledge the privileges deriving from complicity – through their production and consumption patterns – in systems of domination and exploitation that dehumanize and destroy life in Africa;
- Stop silencing and trivializing the voices of African people as they seek to expose the negative impacts and contradictions of neoliberal economic globalization in Africa.

African people's realities, experiences and rich intellectual resources place them in the best position to critically understand their own socio-economic conditions;

- Transform institutions and conduct that perpetuate injustices in the economy and ecology; and
- Seek and engage in a radical spirituality of solidarity manifested in sharing, reparation and justice.

We call on those who collude with systems of domination in economy and ecology – including African government leaders and elites – to recognize, confess, repent and engage in restorative, distributive and transformative justice.

We commit ourselves to:

- Life-affirming theologies in the economy and ecology;
- Connect theologies with struggles for life;
- Strengthen the spaces for churches in partnership with social movements to jointly formulate strategies to overcome poverty, redefine wealth, protect the environment, and to build alternatives to neoliberal economic globalization;
- Promote and affirm gender justice and feminist non-hierarchical models of relating (Joel 2: 28) and the care economy;
- Consolidate the movement for AGAPE economy and ecology in Africa and in the world and dialogue with other disciplines and faiths;
- Call on the northern churches to repent for the African holocaust, which killed over 10 million Africans; and to intensify their efforts toward reparations; and
- Call on northern churches to examine their financial resources and investments and how these impact on poverty.

We are committed to advancing work on the AGAPE process on linking poverty, wealth and ecology and to ensure that these are translated into concrete and life-affirming actions.

- **Letter to Mr Peter Mandelsohn, EU trade commissioner, on signing of interim partnership agreements by African, Caribbean and Pacific (APC) countries, 5 December 2007**

Dear Mr Mandelsohn,

The WCC is concerned about the ongoing pressure exerted by The European Union on African, Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) countries to sign interim Partnership Agreements (EPAs) by December 31st 2007. The pressure involves giving conditions to ACP countries to form themselves into blocs that can sign such agreements. For instance the East African Community (EAC) has just signed such an agreement which will replace preferential trade agreements due to expire on December 31st 2007. This is the first international agreement to be concluded by the EAC as a block as well as the first trade agreement concluded by the European Union with another customs union. The EAC state

will be obliged to open up their markets to goods from the European Union over a period of 25 years. After 15 years, 80 percent of the exports from EU will enter the EAC market free of duties. This covers mainly in goods and services. About one fifth of EAC trade will be completely excluded from any market liberalization requirements.

The agreement, it is claimed, is a first step towards a full Economic Partnership Agreement (EPA) which will integrate the EAC into Global Economy. Negotiations will continue next year with a view to concluding a comprehensive EPA not later than July 2009.

The EU is working on similar negotiations with other ACP countries. Some of them have resisted to be under pressure on the following grounds:

- The time is too short to include parliamentary discussions on interim agreements to take place in these countries.
- The interim agreements contain issues which are still contentious. Such issues are not consistent with the Doha round on development, poverty eradication and rights to food.
- The coercive approach adopted by EU on service liberalization poisons the negotiating atmosphere. There is strong opposition to include the new generation issues which include liberalization of services, sector investments, competitions policy and intellectual property rights.
- EPAs do not have to have these issues to be compatible with WTO rules.
- It is prudent to have the necessary legal frameworks and infrastructure in place prior to opening up local markets to competition with European companies.
- For EPAs to be successful, the preconditions should include domestic legal, administrative and regulatory capacities.
- There is an imminent danger that the interim EPAs will result into a revenue loss for these countries that is needed for poverty eradication.
- EPAs are meant to enhance development and therefore demands for the liberalization of services to be concluded before the end of the year defeat that objective according to South African Development Community (SADC).

The WCC supports, therefore such resistance in ACP countries and also strongly identifies itself with the joint statements given by the All African Conference of Churches (AACC) and the symposium of Episcopal Conferences of Africa and Madagascar (SECAM) to oppose the use of pressure on ACP to sign interim EPAs. The WCC also agrees with the statement given by the Conference of European churches on the same subject.

Just trade, poverty eradication, right to food, welfare and dignity of human life and ecological sustenance should be the criteria for any trade agreement. Negotiations between EU and ACP countries should not be based on pressure and threats but on fairness reminding Europe of its exploitative historical and structural links with these countries. The WCC calls for adequate time to be allocated to ACP countries for

appropriate discussion of EPAs in their parliaments so as to hear the voices of the people in these countries.

Yours sincerely,
Rev. Dr Samuel Kobia
General secretary

- **Joint written statement made at the United Nations Human Rights Council's seventh session calling for the eradication of extreme poverty as a condition to the full and effective enjoyment of the human right to peace, 25 February 2008**

The Spanish Society for the Advancement of International Human Rights Law (SSIHRL), with the support of the Catalonian Agency for Cooperation to Development, adopted on 30 October 2006 the "Luarca Declaration on the Human Right to Peace" as the culmination of a process of extensive consultations with Spanish civil society, including the organization of six expert seminars in different regions⁴.

Following the adoption of the Luarca Declaration, the SSIHRL has continued the process of consultations with international civil society through the organization in of conferences and expert seminars on the human right to peace in all regions of the world⁵. In 2009 the SSIHRL will call for a World NGO Conference to take stock of inputs received from international civil society and to adopt the final text of the *Universal Declaration on the Human Right to Peace*. The new text will thus better represent the aspirations of civil society as a whole.

On 15 March 2007 the Luarca Declaration was first submitted to the fourth session of the Human Rights Council in an oral statement by UNESCO Etxea on behalf of the SSIHRL. Since then several Parallel Meetings have organized at the *Palais des Nations* in Geneva during the sessions of the Human Rights Council. Firstly, on 15 March 2007, both the SSIHRL and the International Society of Human Rights (Frankfurt) convened an open *Information Meeting on the Luarca Declaration*. Secondly, on 16 March 2007 the SSIHRL organized a *technical meeting* with NGO and human rights experts with a view to building a common strategy for a world-wide campaign on the human right to peace. Thirdly, on 11 June 2007 both UNESCO Etxea and SSIHRL organized an additional

⁴ The regional expert seminars took place in Oviedo (27-28 July 2006), Las Palmas de Gran Canaria (17- 18 August 2006), Bilbao (15-16 September 2006), Madrid (21-22 September 2006), Barcelona (28-29 September 2006) and Seville (13-14 October 2006)

⁵ Conferences and expert seminars have already taken place in Bilbao and Geneva (November 2006); Mexico (December 2006), Bogotá, Barcelona and Addis Ababa (March 2007); Caracas and Santo Domingo (April 2007), Morelia (Mexico, 12 May 2007), Bogotá (12 May 2007), Oviedo and Santa Fe (New Mexico, USA, 16-17 May 2007); Washington (14 June 2007) , Nairobi (15 June 2007), Geneva (28 June 2007), Feldkirch (Austria, 31 August 2007), Geneva (11, 12 and 21 September 2007), Luarca (28 September 2007), Madrid (23 October 2007), Monterrey (1st November 2007), Mexico DF, Geneva, Las Palmas de Gran Canaria, Zaragoza and Navía, Asturias (December 2007), Madrid and Barcelona (January 2008), the UN Commission on the Status of Women, New York (February 2008). For more information about these event, please see <http://www.aedidh.org>

Parallel Event focused on the relationship between peace and solidarity rights⁶. Fourthly, on 12 September 2007 a Roundtable on the legal content of the human right to peace was organized by SSIHRL with collaboration of UNESCO Liaison Office in Geneva. Fifthly, on 21st September 2007 the SSIHRL organized the Commemoration of the United Nations International Day of Peace at the Council Chamber of the Palais de Nations. An Expert Consultation has been organized at the 52nd session of the UN Commission on the Status of Women in New York.

Extreme poverty is a universal and multidimensional phenomenon, which currently affects millions of people in both in rich and poor countries⁷. According to the World Health Organization statistics, about 1 billion people globally live in extreme poverty on an income of just \$1 a day and 270 million people, most of them women and children, died as a result of poverty since 1990⁸. Thus, peace is not only economic and social justice, as important as it may be, it relies first on respect of the human dignity and self-esteem of the poor⁹.

As Mr Leandro Despouy stated in 1996¹⁰ the lack of basic security, or the absence of one or more factors enabling families to assume basic responsibilities and to enjoy fundamental rights, leads to chronic poverty when it simultaneously affects several aspects of people's lives, when it is prolonged and when it severely compromises people's chances of regaining their rights and of reassuming their responsibilities in the foreseeable future. The lack of basic security destroys family ties and prevents people from taking responsibility for family planning and proper care of their children, thus increasing child mortality. Widespread extreme poverty ths inhibits the realization of human rights¹¹ in general and political, civil, economic, social and cultural rights in particular¹². Today there exists a worldwide consensus that extreme poverty is the most global and permanent violation of human rights.

People affected by chronic extreme poverty are at risk of becoming socially excluded from full participation in the society in which they live. Usually the poor, the unemployed, people belonging to ethnic minorities and other vulnerable groups remain "outsiders" and low in the social hierarchy¹³. Moreover, the poor may express their despair and trauma through physical violence or conflict¹⁴. Thus, as stated by the Secretary- General of the United Nations, full realization of political, economic and social rights of all people is the solid way to maintain the social balance which is vital for a society to develop in peace. Conversely, war and the use of force may increases poverty since they hinders all aspect of development.

⁶ Panellists were representatives of the World Organization Against Torture, the International Society of Human Rights, UNESCO Etxea and the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights

⁷ Report submitted by Ms. M. Lizin, independent expert on human rights and extreme poverty, E/CN.4/2000/52, of 25 February 2000, paragraphs 10-11

⁸ Report of the WHO, Regional Office for the Western Pacific, *Health Poverty and MDG*, 2005

⁹ 56th meeting of the Commission on human rights, E/CN.4/2003/L.11/Add.3, 22 April 2003, Paragraph 1.a

¹⁰ Final report submitted by the independent expert on human right and poverty to the Sub-Commission, E/CN.4/Sub.2/1996/13, 28 June 1996, Annex III

¹¹ Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action, World Conference on Human Rights, A/CONF. 157/23, 12 July 1993, paragraph 14

¹² GA resolution 53/146 of 8 March 1999, Human rights and extreme poverty, conclusion 3

¹³ Report submitted by Mr Arjun Sengupta, independent expert on human rights and extreme poverty, E/CN.4/2005/49, of 11 February 2005, paragraph 14

¹⁴ Report submitted by Ms. M. Lizin, independent expert on human rights and extreme poverty, E/CN.4/2001/54, of 16 February 2001, paragraph 93

To establish lasting peace, the right to enjoy the highest attainable standard of physical, mental and spiritual health should be central to creating and sustaining the capabilities that the poor need to escape from the scourge of poverty. As stressed by Mr Paul Hunt, special rapporteur on United Nations the right to the highest attainable standard of health, ill health destroys livelihoods, reduces worker productivity, lowers educational achievement, limits opportunities and reduces human development¹⁵. A fundamental right which must be respected not only in times of peace but also in times of war, is the right to a minimum standard of living, including regular, permanent and unrestricted access, either directly or by means of financial purchases, to quantitatively and qualitatively adequate and sufficient food supplies¹⁶. Thus, taking into account that the eradication of poverty is an ethical, social, political and economic imperative of humankind¹⁷, the international community must urgently ensure that “persons living in extreme poverty are entitled to the full enjoyment of all human rights, including the right to participate in the adoption of decisions which concern them, and to contribute to the well-being of their families, their communities and humankind”¹⁸.

International human rights law is concerned particularly with vulnerable marginalized and minority groups who live in extreme poverty. The exponential increase in prostitution and trafficking of women and children is a perceptible reflection of the spread of poverty¹⁹. People's security also deals with international and states' legislation prohibiting and punishing violence in particular in relation to women and the girl-child, and taking action against trafficking and sexual exploitation of women and children. The extremely poor, especially women, children elderly and disabled persons, should be the main targets of anti-poverty strategies. To be successful in these strategies, children's right to food needs to be respected in order to combat hunger and guarantee peace²⁰. And as many empirical studies demonstrate women's full enjoyment and participation in all human rights is a precondition to the full realization of the right to peace and has a major impact on the enjoyment of these rights for society as a whole.

The International Peace Conference held in The Hague in 1899 concluded that peace finds its roots in the “consciousness of the world”. Nevertheless, as Martin Luther King said, real peace can never be reached realized if the word “hunger”, like other words of oppression such as slavery, racism and discrimination, is not definitely removed from the dictionary.

Those who live in extreme poverty, in special poor rural women, understand better than

¹⁵ Report submitted by Mr Paul Hunt, independent expert on the right of everyone to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health, E/CN.4/2003/58, of 13 February 2003, paragraph 45 and 46

¹⁶ Report submitted by Mr Jean Ziegler, special rapporteur on the right to food, E/CN.4/2002/58, of 10 January 2002, paragraph 72

¹⁷ Copenhagen Declaration on Social Development and Programme of Action of the World Summit for Social Development, A/CONF.166/9, chapter I, 1995

¹⁸ *Draft guiding principles “Extreme poverty and human rights: the rights of the poor”*, Report of the Sub-Commission on the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights on its fifty-eight session, A/HRC/Sub.1/58/36, 11 September 2006, p. 31

¹⁹ Report submitted by Ms. M. Lizin, supra note 6, paragraph 58

²⁰ Report submitted by Mr Jean Ziegler, special rapporteur on the right to food, A/HRC/4/30, of 19 January 2007, paragraph 4

we realize what is at stake in wars and who ultimately benefits from them. They therefore are in a position to demand a redistribution of the world's priorities and resources²¹ and to urge all Member States to ensure their availability to live on an income of \$3 a day. It follows that such a redistribution can be never reached when extraction of resources from the poor is not accompanied by fair and adequate compensations.

As stated in paragraph 13 (Preamble) of the 2006 Luarca Declaration on the Human Right to Peace,

“...the promotion of a culture of peace, the world-wide redistribution of resources and the achievement of social justice must contribute to the establishment of a new international economic order which will facilitate the fulfilment of the proposals of this Declaration, by eliminating the inequality, exclusion and poverty which generate structural violence incompatible with peace on the national and international levels”.

We therefore urge the United Nations to establish a new partnership based on social justice and equity, non- discrimination and gender equality, respect of all human rights and the rule of law by all, including corporations and business. We also urge Member States to implement the necessary mechanisms to recognize the negative impact of extreme poverty in the enjoyment of the human right to peace and to realize the poverty goals of the Declaration and the Programme of Action of the World Summit for Social Development, the Millennium Development Goals²² and the Monterrey Consensus on Financing for Development.

We welcome the General Assembly call to the High Commissioner for Human Rights to carry out a constructive dialogue and consultations with Member States, the specialized agencies, intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations, on how the international community may better promote an international environment leading to the full realization of the right of people to peace²³.

- **Joint communiqué issued by the WCC, WARC and CWM following a workshop on the spirituality of resistance, liberation and transformation, Matanzas, Cuba, 15-20 May 2008**

Preamble

We are in Cuba, a country that approaches the celebration of 50 years of its revolution. Cubans describe the present period as a “Kairotic” passage, a time of crisis and opportunity. The people's suffering is acute because of the U.S.-imposed blockade and the general forces of empire. By “empire” we mean the complex and dynamic international regime of power anchored by the United States, with its military power, neoliberal globalization, racist and patriarchal ideologies and policies of environmental

²¹ Report submitted by Ms. M. Lizin, independent expert on human rights and extreme poverty, E/CN.4/2004/43, of 29 February 2004, paragraph 93

²² Paragraph 11 of the AG Resolution 60/131 “Implementation of the World Programme of Action concerning Disabled Persons: Realizing the Millennium Development Goals for persons with disabilities”

²³ UNGA Res/60/163, of 2 March 2006, *Promotion of peace as a vital requirement for the full enjoyment of all human rights by all*, paragraph 8

degradation. In spite of these forces of empire and Cubans' relentless suffering, isolation and impoverization, we have been inspired by the ways Cubans persevere in struggle, embodying joy and resistance, dignity and self-esteem.

In the present moment, for example, Cubans' earlier revolutionary successes in agrarian reform have been set back by the empire's brutal blockade, other international developments, and by tensions within the country. Still, Cubans press forward with ongoing reform, inventively crafting new modes of agro-ecology.

Our meeting in Matanzas has thus been blessed by having Cuba as a present point of reference throughout all our discussions of the crises of empire. This workshop was originally planned to take place in Beirut, Lebanon. The explosion of conflict there, and the continuing illegal occupation of Palestine by the forces of empire, remind us that this is a Kairotic moment for so many other groups worldwide.

We have gathered as a workshop, responding to the initiative of the "Oikotree" movement, an ecumenical project that has as its special goal the task of identifying and living out those spiritualities that put "justice at the heart of faith". Our workshop was convened by the World Alliance of Reformed Churches (WARC), the Council for World Mission (CWM), and the World Council of Churches (WCC).

Key points

The wide array of justice movements in Cuba and around the world, and whether or not they draw upon religious organizations and leadership, challenge us to re-think and re-envision what spirituality is and what it must become in the present time.

Members of this workshop, as a people of spiritualities and traditions from many continents, both Christian and non-Christian, achieved a consensus on the following points. We set them out here to stimulate further reflection and action on the kind of spirituality that energizes and sustains justice movements.

On the multiplicity of spiritualities

- We affirm that the problems of empire, amid which justice movements struggle, are **not only political problems but also spiritual challenges**. Empire spawns its own destructive spiritualities, such as the "religious right," and thus it seeks always to co-opt the powers of religion for imperial aims. New spiritualities are coming forth to oppose imperial spiritualities, and these should be supported.
- All organized religions have a special challenge of resisting the tactics of division, such as forms of denominationalism and fundamentalism, which often fuel ethnic, racial, nationalist and regional strife, and so strengthen the powers of empire.
- Justice movements require a new solidarity among religious groups and all peoples of conscience (secular and religious), and thus we affirm and honor the full multiplicity of spiritualities that enliven such movements.

- Religious groups and all peoples of conscience should recognize a leading role for indigenous peoples, honouring especially their earth-centered spirituality, focusing on interdependencies of body, mind, land, community, and spirit, as resources for a liberating justice for all creation. We affirm the struggle of all First Nations peoples for their land and for their rights to self-determination.
- In this time especially, the empire's worldwide "war on terror" has created a virulent form of Islamophobia that compounds other related racisms. Emergent spiritualities must stand with our Muslim sisters and brothers and work with them for a more just world for all peoples.
- The spirituality of justice movements is strengthened by the mobile, boundary-crossing spiritualities of immigrant and displaced peoples' struggle and vision.
- In order to sustain justice movements, spiritualities should affirm the outcries of rage and grief from those wounded by injustice, for these are positive values that can energize and focus revolutionary change.
- Justice movements require, and also themselves create, new communities of wonder, joy and mystery. In these movements, peoples' pain and gratitude, their sadness and hopes, all break forth for new spiritual solidarities.
- Participating in justice movements' arts (music, dance, painting, sculpture, drama, street theatre, and more) is essential to people's survival and to realizing a liberating spirituality. Leaders in the arts are thus co-partners in nurturing and strengthening the spiritualities that can resist regimes of injustice.

On Christian spiritualities

- Justice movements challenge Christians to relinquish the hegemony of their Christian language and rituals in movement work, even when this means leaving the comfort zones of Christian belief and practice. New acts of Christian humility and confession – due to Christians' construction of empire building, colonization, racism and patriarchy – must entail a new collective and variegated spirituality forged from among all peoples, recognizing especially the initiatives of long-colonized and oppressed peoples.
- Christian leaders and institutions, when participating in justice movements, must foster liberating spiritualities by re-interpreting their Christian stories, beliefs and practices to challenge forthrightly the forces of empire.
- For all religious traditions, the demands made upon us by justice movements lead us toward spiritual openness to diverse readings of oral and written sacred texts and traditions, and even to a willingness to question and contest some emphases in these sources.

A closing word

- All newly emergent spiritualities need a special vigilance about ways that neo-colonial, neo-imperial, racist and patriarchal styles of thought and action can reconstitute themselves, even in communities claiming to be in struggle against injustice.
 - We affirm that the call to participation in justice movements is so demanding that we proceed in a spirit of humility and tentativeness, confessing that the spirituality we most need is not yet completely known to us, still to be birthed by our common work, struggle and celebration of life.
- **Statement by WCC general secretary about the global food crisis made on the occasion of the Conference on World Food Security, Rome, Italy, 3-5 June 2008**

Food and faith. A call to the churches and policy statement on the global food crisis

*“The fields of the poor may yield much food, but it is swept away by injustice”
Proverbs 13:23*

Ensuring food security for all of the world’s people is among the greatest challenges facing humanity in the early years of the 21st century. The churches have an essential role to play, and to be effective we must face the global food crisis together. While churches and agencies of Christian witness have provided important services in the past, there is so much more that we could achieve. Individually and collectively, the time has come for churches to reassess and strengthen their policies of advocacy and support in addressing this crisis.

The World Council of Churches (WCC) is closely following the High-Level Conference on World Food Security now being held in Rome, 3-5 June 2008. We applaud the determination being shown there in tackling the impact of climate change on food production and bio-energy, and confronting the challenges this situation poses to the achievement of global food security. The WCC commends the UN initiative in convening the conference in which many heads of state and governments are participating. We express the hope that in response to the call by the UN secretary general, Ban Ki-Moon, to act boldly the world leaders may demonstrate their commitment to act against hunger and poverty and that this will lead to timely action. Millions of world citizens are eagerly awaiting the decision of the conference, hoping that it will make a difference in their lives as far as access to food is concerned.

The WCC is engaged in a review of its own policies and projects touching on food supply and its place in the quest for economic justice. Policy recommendations, along with a detailed statement on the global food crisis, will be submitted to the WCC executive committee for adoption at their next meeting in September 2008.

While climate change is one factor behind the global food crisis, the WCC views the primary cause of the current crisis as inappropriate human actions which have induced climate change and skyrocketing food prices. Human actions driven by greed have created poverty, hunger and climate change. Humanity must be challenged to overcome its greed.

The scandal of hunger demands the immediate attention of the churches. An estimated 850 million people in the world today suffer from hunger. Of this figure, about 820 million live in developing countries – the very countries expected to be most affected by climate change. Many of the hungry die for lack of food; and many more suffer from diseases and disabilities caused by insufficient or unbalanced diets. It is often children who are victims of malnutrition and who are deprived of the possibility of fullness of life. The gospel that calls us to love our neighbours compels Christians and their churches to become more involved in meeting the needs of this world.

As far back as 1975, the WCC lifted up for the churches' attention the issues of famine, malnutrition and questions related to food production and distribution policies. Emphasis was placed on ensuring that small farmers have access to land and the capacity to produce sufficient food for themselves and their families. At that time, 400 million people had an insufficient supply of food. Today this number has doubled. The WCC attributes this problem mainly to present patterns of production and distribution. The market continues to be the main mechanism pushed by the prevailing development paradigm to take care of food production and distribution. The same mechanism is responsible for providing incentives to avaricious business entities who speculate on commodity (including food) and oil prices. The recent upsurge in the prices of food staples makes it increasingly difficult to achieve the Millennium Development Goal of reducing the number of poor people by half by the year 2015. The World Council of Churches is deeply concerned and outraged by this untenable situation and calls on the churches to formulate and implement programmes that seek to deal with hunger and its structural causes.

Related to concerns around food production and distribution are the consequences of unsustainable agricultural activities on the environment. Climate change has been exacerbated by the mismanagement of resources; and the production of bio-fuels on a massive scale (in the name of reducing climate change-inducing green-house gas emissions) has not only contributed to rising food prices but may also have adverse effects on soil and water quality and biodiversity. Moreover, the increasing dominance of agri-corporations that are aimed at generating high profits has helped to propagate farming practices that damage the environment.

Even as our executive committee prepares to take further action, the WCC calls for a life-giving agriculture that nurtures the earth and provides nutritious and affordable food for all people. We call for the participation of small farmers in the production of food, and for the just distribution of food resources. As churches, we must continue to accompany and support sustainable communities and movements of farmers and landless rural workers.

The world's churches are called to advocate against the production of agri-fuels at the expense of food production and the environment, and to serve as living examples in the promotion of life-giving agriculture.

Rev. Dr Samuel Kobia
General secretary

- **Joint written statement made at the United Nations Human Rights Council's ninth session calling for the global food crisis to be examined from the perspective of access to food being considered a fundamental human right, 10 September 2008**

M. le Président,

Nous souhaitons remercier M. de Schutter pour son rapport et pour les efforts déployés afin de promouvoir la réalisation du droit à l'alimentation.

Nous saluons l'approche du Rapporteur Spécial abordant la crise alimentaire mondiale sous l'angle des droits de l'homme et l'attention particulière qu'il a portée à la réalisation du droit à l'alimentation des plus vulnérables, ainsi que son encouragement à une participation effective de ces derniers dans la réalisation de ce droit.

Cette crise, résultat d'un ensemble de facteurs, ne pourra pas être résolue à long terme sans une action concrète, ferme et immédiate de la part des Etats, des institutions internationales concernées et de la société civile dans son ensemble. Nous estimons que des changements structurels plus profonds et une distribution plus juste et équitable des ressources alimentaires s'imposent dans l'intérêt des générations présentes et futures. En effet, l'augmentation de la production agricole, à elle-seule, ne suffira pas à contrer la crise si elle n'est pas accompagnée par des stratégies nationales efficaces protégeant les intérêts des petits agriculteurs locaux et garantissant aux groupes les plus défavorisés de la population la réalisation effective du droit à l'alimentation.

M. le Président,

En raison de ce qui vient d'être dit et sérieusement préoccupés par la vulnérabilité accrue des plus pauvres et démunis, nous exhortons les Etats à prendre, sans plus tarder, des mesures efficaces pour promouvoir la réalisation du droit à l'alimentation et garantir la sécurité alimentaire de leurs populations.

Nous souhaitons également:

- *Inviter* le Conseil à continuer à examiner la question de la crise alimentaire selon une approche fondée sur les droits de l'homme et à poursuivre tout effort

nécessaire pour promouvoir et protéger l'accès à une alimentation adéquate, notamment pour les plus pauvres et fragilisées de la société ;

- *Rappeler* aux Etats, que conformément au droit international, ils leurs incombe de protéger et de respecter le droit à la vie et la dignité humaine. Ils ont, par conséquent, l'obligation de *protéger, respecter* et *garantir* le droit à une alimentation adéquate, ainsi que l'accès aux moyens de production alimentaire ;
- *Recommander* aux Etats d'*élaborer* et de *mettre effectivement en œuvre* des stratégies nationales efficaces visant à garantir la réalisation du droit à l'alimentation, telle que préconisée dans l'observation générale no 12 (1999) du Comité sur les droits économiques, sociaux et culturels (CODESC) ;
- *Encourager* les Etats à s'inspirer des Directives volontaires pour le droit à l'alimentation de la FAO pour la mise en œuvre du droit à une alimentation adéquate dans le contexte de la sécurité alimentaire nationale ;
- *Demander* aux Etats et aux institutions internationales d'adopter et de veiller à l'application de politiques environnementales durables relatives à la chaîne de production et de distribution alimentaires, afin de ne pas compromettre la réalisation du droit à l'alimentation pour les générations futures, et de tenir compte de l'*Evaluation internationale des connaissances, des sciences et des technologies agricoles pour le développement* (IAASTD)
- *Exhorter* les Etats et les institutions financières multilatérales à réviser et à promouvoir des règles et des politiques agricoles commerciales plus justes et équitables visant à protéger du *dumping* et de la concurrence déloyale les petits agriculteurs locaux et à garantir leur subsistance;
- *Inviter* les Etats et les institutions internationales à écouter la voix des plus vulnérables et à garantir leur participation dans l'élaboration, la mise en œuvre et l'évaluation des programmes qui les concernent. Ces derniers auront sans doute une leçon à nous apprendre : le sens des mots « *partage* » et « *solidarité* »...

Merci M. le Président

- **The Guatemala Declaration from the AGAPE Consultation, the links between poverty, wealth and ecology: ecumenical perspectives in Latin America and the Caribbean, 10 October 2008**

An AGAPE Consultation on *The Links between Poverty, Wealth and Ecology: Ecumenical Perspectives in Latin America and the Caribbean* took place on 6-10 October 2008 at the *La Salle* University Residence Centre in Guatemala City. The meeting was

convened by the World Council of Churches, the Latin America Council of Churches and the Christian Ecumenical Council of Guatemala.

The consultation began with a pre-meeting in which men and women of the faith, from the Youth, Women and Gender Justice and Indigenous Peoples pastoral services, responding to the gospel of justice, shared experiences about the situation we are living through in Latin America and the Caribbean, with regard to Poverty, Wealth and Ecology.

We approached and discussed the following issues from a faith perspective:

The global situation and the climate crisis

The climate crisis has been caused by human beings, especially by the industries of the countries of the North, which are mainly responsible for the greenhouse effect. Some countries have signed the Kyoto Protocol and other European Community agreements, but some countries do not have the political will to commit themselves to reducing carbon dioxide emissions. Some of these agreements have set medium and long-term targets for the implementation of their policies, which is not enough to stop damage to the environment.

The ecological debt is due to the destruction of ecosystems for purposes of human consumption, especially irresponsible consumption in the North. This destruction is caused by oil, gas, mining and timber companies, hydroelectricity mega projects, agribusiness and others that exploit natural resources to sustain a model that endangers local communities and the planet as a whole. The international financial institutions also bear a lot of responsibility because they finance this extraction of resources while paying little attention to its social and environmental consequences. The situation is made more acute by the water crisis. Major and unprecedented droughts and floods have caused a lack of access to drinking water and sanitation.

There has been a marked increase of migration from rural to urban areas and abroad because of the lack of local opportunities to make a living. Political persecution is partly to blame. The result is broken families, violence and the uprooting of people from their cultures.

As a result of their forms of production and consumption, the mainly Northern post-industrial countries and the institutions that reproduce patriarchal models in our countries owe a social and ecological debt to humanity and the Earth. This debt has accumulated in the course of centuries of looting and depredation that have caused destruction, death and poverty. It has imposed on us a system that puts the market at the centre rather than human beings and nature, and this system is having a devastating impact on us.

“Food crisis”

Although the world exports agricultural produce valued at \$500,000 million per year, eight million people die every year from starvation and diseases associated with hunger and 840 million people, including farmers and agricultural workers, suffer from a lack of

food. During 2007, world production of grains increased four per cent in comparison with 2006. The problem of hunger in the world is not therefore due to a lack of food but rather to the fact that millions of human beings cannot buy it. The central problem (high production of food and increases in the price of food) results from the increasingly monopolistic concentration of the world agricultural-food industry.

At the same time, transnational companies are trying to control the other element that is essential to the cycle of life – water – increasingly presenting this as something normal and inevitable.

The search for non-fossil fuels has led to the increasing use of wheat, soya and corn for the production of agrofuels, which increases the price of grains and reduces the population's access to grains for consumption.

Financial crisis

The origin of the global financial crisis lies in the usury and endless accumulation that are in the very nature of capitalism. Exacerbated by neoliberalism, this system has had serious negative global consequences. According to the experts, the cost of the \$700,000 million (or even more) United States rescue package for the banks will be borne by the people because of the capacity of transnational capitalism to transfer its crises to the system's peripheral countries. This domination by finance capital is unprecedented and goes hand-in-hand with speculation and the indebtedness of peripheral countries, from which the central countries extract immense flows of resources, thereby limiting social investment in, for example, health, education, housing, roads and drinking water.

Distribution of wealth

World per capita income has currently reached \$6,954, which is eight times more than the poverty line and would comfortably satisfy basic needs and eliminate world poverty if there were an adequate social redistribution of wealth. However, 2,600 million people, equivalent to 40% of the world population, are living in poverty and among them, 1,000 million of these are living in extreme poverty. Far from easing, this profound inequity has increased on a world scale, reducing the share of developing regions, except for China and India. In particular, Latin America and Africa have seen their share of world income fall. The increasing social inequality in the world has been accentuated by globalization and the implementation of neoliberal policies on a planetary scale.

Latin America and the Caribbean

In addition to the inequality between countries, there are major social differences between people within these same countries. Latin America and the Caribbean are considered to be the regions with the greatest social inequality in the world and the evidence confirms that these inequalities have tended to become more acute in recent decades.

Imposition of the neoliberal model, which gives pride of place to individuals and capital accumulation, has increased inequalities between the few who are rich and the millions who are poor. This model has looted and destroyed creation with the only goal being excessive accumulation. This model has become a great machine to produce poverty and

misery. Governments are also responsible for promoting the interests of capital and the economic power groups, to the detriment of the majority of peoples. Encouraged by the "developed" countries, transnational companies and governments have created administrative and legal structures that sustain the system, coordinate corruption and promote their own interests.

The neoliberal model promotes a drastic reduction of the state's role in the economy, fiscal austerity, privatization, the adoption of policies favourable to the free market and the opening up of the international economy.

There are 100 million young people between the ages of 15 and 24 in Latin America. Ten million of these young people are unemployed, 22 million neither study nor work for various reasons and more than 30 million work in the informal economy in precarious conditions.

The neoliberal economic model and its policies affect communities as a whole but have a greater impact on women, whose poverty is exacerbated by the privatization of health and education services, unequal pay, increased working hours and the increasing price of basic goods, as well as the destruction of their livelihoods. Their invisible and unrecognized domestic work subsidizes the global economic model.

In addition, the work-production-domination system results in various forms of exploitation, with human beings at the service of production rather than production at the service of human beings. Proclaimed by the Bible as a gift and source of human fulfilment, work has been diminished in terms of its dignity and spiritual content.

Despite all these processes of social, economic, religious and political exclusion, people continue to resist and provide alternatives for satisfying their goal of living well. Governments have emerged that defend national and popular interests and this tendency has become more pronounced in the region.

We long for the birth of a new world founded on: 1) The indigenous view of the world, which sees the Earth as a mother rather than as a collection of resources to be exploited and which sees human beings as part of creation. 2) The feminist principles that promote non-hierarchical decision-making models and gender justice. 3) The energy, enthusiasm and creative activity of youth.

To this end, we want to highlight the signs of hope in Latin America. In recent years, we have noted the gradual retreat of neoliberalism, which can be observed in: 1) The increasing strength of the movements of indigenous peoples, peasants and women, who are fighting for social, economic and ecological justice, especially for food sovereignty and who demand that their governments be made accountable. 2) The emergence of democratic governments in Bolivia, Ecuador, Venezuela and Paraguay and of others who call for the economic independence of their countries and who promote social policies aimed at eradicating poverty and inequity in the region. 3) The development of regional initiatives that show an increase in South-South co-operation and solidarity between the

countries of Latin America and the Caribbean, such as the Bank of the South (*Banco del Sur*), the Fund of the South (*Fondo del Sur*) and the Bolivarian Alternative for the Americas (ALBA).

II. Our alternatives and commitments

1. Implement food sovereignty and promote the solidarity and community economy, which values and promotes good living conditions, and in which surpluses are produced for the benefit of those involved rather than to make a profit.
2. Create alliances with organizations who also want to promote cooperation and strengthen the dialogue between churches and social organizations with a view to increasing our impact in society.
3. Create institutional forums in which women, indigenous peoples, youth and people with different capacities can actively participate in decision-making. Recognize their capacity to contribute to promoting just alternatives. Promote their role as political actors and strengthen them so they can transform their family, church and social environment.
4. Promote the integration of people with different capacities into the life of the churches and society.
5. Denounce the local and global ecological impact of transnational companies in the mining, oil and other sectors, which are destroying our livelihoods and making our communities ever poorer.
6. Call for the unconditional cancellation of the External Debt and the implementation of audits in all indebted countries. Recognize that the external debt has been one of the mechanisms used by multilateral institutions (World Bank, IMF) and their allies to loot our countries, provoking the climate crisis and other disasters and also building up a social and ecological debt to our peoples.
7. Announce and proclaim a gospel of justice and peace for all human beings and Creation.

From the perspective of women

8. Use Latin American and Caribbean feminist pastoral theology to dismantle all the religious myths that perpetuate and justify the historic inequality between men and women.
9. Give resolute support to the actions taken by women in the fight for their rights, and vigorously reject everything that generates any kind of violence against women.

10. Delegitimize the fundamentalist discourse and practice of those who intervene in public affairs to punish, proscribe and prohibit sexual health initiatives, particularly those for women, as this has a major impact on reproductive health and increases the incidence of HIV/AIDS.

From the perspective of indigenous peoples:

11. Organize a world conference of indigenous people's churches to plan strategies to build a more just and solidarity-based model based on the perspective of indigenous peoples.
12. Encourage the development of a national and international legal framework, including implementation of ILO (International Labour Organization) Convention 169, the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and national constitutions, laws and regulations that guarantee collective rights.
13. Raise the awareness of the churches about the need to support the return of ancestral lands and cultural property, and to commit themselves to denouncing the massacres and genocides suffered by indigenous peoples.

From the perspective of youth:

14. Raise the awareness of youth and churches with a view to generating responsible and healthy attitudes, moving from an attitude of protest to an attitude of making constructive solidarity-based proposals for action and accompaniment.
15. Develop a consensus on new values that allows us to promote a new civilizing and communitarian model of thinking for young people.
16. Promote the implementation of legal and institutional frameworks for youth by governments, social organizations and churches.

Let Jesus, who restores the dignity of all creatures who are indebted, impoverished or who have suffered violence, maintain our commitment until the day when we can see "the new skies and the new earth". Let the Holy Spirit, which encourages hope and promotes solidarity, strengthen the certainty of this prophetic vision. Let God, who encourages all efforts aimed at achieving the integral fullness of Life, make us fight tirelessly for the construction and installation of his Reign.

III. Recommendations to the churches

1. The churches face a major challenge, starting with their first task of explaining the predatory and anti-civilization characteristics of the neoliberal model. Until people are clear about the inhuman and predatory nature of this model, they will not have the tools they need to try and change it.

2. The churches should actively accompany the people's resistance to attacks on their rights. This resistance is expressed in the various ways in which they defend their economic, social, cultural, political and environmental rights. It is expressed in the communities' defense of water, in their resistance against mining, in their defense of forests and rivers, in the resistance of the women's movement, the indigenous peoples' movement, the youth movement and the many social and civil society organizations. The diversity of resistance to the neoliberal model requires the churches to develop strategies to accompany and participate in it, given the great dispersion of struggles and processes.
3. The churches should disseminate the results of studies on the inevitable ethical, economic and ecological limitations of capital accumulation.
4. The churches should convert all their ethical and spiritual capital into instruments to promote the wide-ranging mobilization and coordination of social movements and actors that will allow them to find a path towards the construction of another kind of logic for the reproduction of life.
5. In the name of the faith that links us through love and makes us a single community, living in the world created by God, we challenge the churches to raise their prophetic voice, denounce injustice and announce the Good News.

- **Statement on the global food crisis by the WCC general secretary on World Food Day, 16 October 2008**

“The fields of the poor may yield much food, but it is swept away through injustice.” (Proverbs 13: 23); “Never again will foreign warriors come and take away your grain and wine. You raised it, and you will keep it, praising the Lord.” (Isaiah 62: 8b)

Background

The WCC's engagement with issues related to food goes back over thirty years. As far back as 1975, the WCC lifted up for churches' attention the issues of famine and malnutrition. In 1980, the WCC central committee released a *Statement on Food* critiquing the use of access to food as a political weapon, patenting of seed varieties by international corporations and utilization of food varieties for alternative energy sources. In the same vein, the WCC issued a *Statement on the International Food Disorder* at the 1983 WCC Assembly in Vancouver, Canada.

Food and the means of its production are central to human life. Access to food – as a necessity of life – is a human right. Our economic and political systems must guarantee that none go hungry while others consume excessively. Practices from the sowing of seeds to the sharing of food in community have been formative for different cultures. Rituals and feast symbolize the divine gift of abundant life for all. Throughout the Bible and in the Christian tradition of prayer and worship, food features prominently. We pray

in the Lord's Prayer: "Give us this day our daily bread." The breaking of bread and sharing of wine in the Eucharist are at the heart of the community that Christ calls us to be: "The Eucharist embraces all aspects of life. It is a representative act of thanksgiving and offering on behalf of the whole world. The Eucharistic celebration demands reconciliation and sharing among all those regarded as brothers and sisters in the one family of God and is a constant challenge in the search for appropriate relationship in social, economic and political life (see Matt 5:23f; I Cor.10:16f etc.). All kinds of injustice, racism, separation and lack of freedom are radically challenged when we share in the body and blood of Christ" (para 20, BEM Document).

Churches' response

As the global food crisis continues to unfold and impact on the most vulnerable in our societies, this Eucharistic vision calls on the churches to take responsibility to address the crisis and its structural roots in a committed, comprehensive and timely manner.

Currently, many churches and their specialized ministries are responding to the crisis. Through the Ecumenical Advocacy Alliance churches continue to advocate for the primacy of the right to food in global trade in agriculture. The churches need to continue to hold international institutions, governments, corporations and financial speculators accountable for the realization of the right to food and food sovereignty. Based on the Eucharistic vision, churches are called to bring the fundamental links between food, community, ecology and life back into perspective. By using their lands and other means at their hands churches can promote life-giving agriculture. By supporting communities and movements of farmers and landless rural workers they can advocate for just solutions to the food crisis.

Contours of the crisis: soaring food prices and the scourge of hunger

Since the beginning of this year, prices of staple foods such as rice, wheat and corn have surged. Spiralling prices of oil and agricultural inputs have sky rocketed the costs of food production and distribution. Small-scale farmers are not in a position to benefit from the recent price escalation and the increase represents a major calamity for the poor and further undermines their right to food. The FAO estimates that now close to one billion people live with constant hunger. Children are the primary victims of hunger-related diseases and malnutrition that deprive them of the possibility of the fullness of life. Women carry the burden of adjustment to the crisis by expending greater time and energy on seeking cheaper food alternatives.

The scourge of hunger has serious consequences for peace and security. Mounting desperation over soaring food prices has already triggered political conflicts and riots in many countries. The World Trade Organization (WTO) Doha round of trade negotiation was expected to solve the issue of food but it is regrettable that the meeting of the DOHA Round did not produce a process to address trade packages that will ensure equitable distribution and production of food. The WTO, The World Bank, The International Monetary Fund and the Organization for Economic Cooperation (OECD)- are all putting pressure on nations to complete this round of trade agreements as a way to solve the

current food crisis. However, many organizations working on trade issues have recognized that the Doha agreement is not helpful because it does not go far enough. It does not encourage countries to increase domestic production and build local food systems so as to ensure food for all their citizens. It builds on a model of trade of import and export of food.

On the whole, the global food crisis stems from and reflects a failure to uphold justice and sustainability within an economic system that is driven by the values of greed and materialism. The prevailing economic paradigm has failed in providing just compensation and support to those who grow our food, in generating livelihoods that offer just wages, in developing just distribution mechanisms to ensure that all people have access to food, and in producing food in ways that are respectful of the environment

A crisis of production or of distribution and access?

It must be emphasized that the crisis is not primarily of production, but of distribution and access. Current global food supplies are sufficient to feed 12 billion people – double the world's population – but only if everyone had equal access and no one took more than their fair share (FAO 2008). While global grain production has not been able to meet demand in recent years, people in rich countries have been consuming five times the amount of grain consumed by people in poor countries.

The makings of the current food crisis may be traced to three decades of neglect of agriculture and indiscriminate neo-liberal economic reforms pushed mainly by international financial institutions on developing economies together with trade liberalization policies that exposed farmers in poor countries to subsidised imports from rich nations. In recent decades control over the global food system (e.g. seeds and fertiliser supply, trade and retail) is increasingly concentrated in the hands of a few powerful international corporations who have benefitted the most from rising prices.

It has been noted that despite the fact that many small farmers contribute about 80% of food in the rural areas, they are not protected and supported.

For too long, mainstream development thinking has viewed agriculture as marginal for economic growth rather than as the source of life and key to eradicating poverty. Capital-intensive, export-oriented, mono-cultural models of agricultural production were promoted which effectively wiped out millions of rural livelihoods, eroded the incomes of small farmers and food producers, undermining rural traditions and ways of life. This has been a major cause for massive migration from rural to urban areas which further weakened the local food production systems. More and more countries have become net food importers. The drive towards higher export productivity and profits at the expense of development of domestic consumption has propagated unsustainable farming practices that have accelerated soil, water and air degradation. The conversion of lands to industrial use and the privatization of water and other natural resources crucial to growing food have further deepened the crisis.

Droughts and floods caused by climate change have resulted in reduced harvests in some countries. The expansion of the production of agro-fuels has competed with the cultivation of crops for food. Higher food prices have not benefitted to small farmers – whose capacities to produce food have been severely weakened by “free market” policies. The price increases have instead benefited giant transnational agri-businesses that exercise increasing control over agricultural production and distribution as well as financial speculators.

The prevailing economic paradigm has failed to provide just compensation and support to those responsible for growing most of the food that feeds the majority of the people. Generating rural and urban livelihoods requires just wages and prices, distribution mechanisms that ensure access to food for all, and production of food in ways that are respectful of the environment.

Highly indebted poor countries continue to pay back their debts to rich countries while experiencing the food crisis. It is not right that these countries are still repaying large amounts of money to the richer world while their people are struggling to get the basics of life such as food.

In view of the foregoing, the World Council of Churches general secretary calls on international institutions, regional intergovernmental bodies and governments to

Urge public and private institutions to address volatility in food prices and agriculture prices by re-establishing public stocks at national and regional levels. Stocks provide an important buffer against price volatility and food insecurity. Transparently held stocks will discourage hoarding and speculation on commodity markets. Coordinated action is required at international level to manage supply at the international level and regulate global commodity.

Supports UNCTAD’s code of restrictive practices which will prevent firms from abusing their market power and encourages the creation of global just rules which will address the power held by a few transnational companies. The market power of agribusiness companies must be checked and controlled.

Calls for introduction of legislation at all levels that enshrines the right to food and food sovereignty; such legislation shall aim to

- Protect farmers from subsidized imports,
- Guarantee fair and stable prices for small food producers,
- Introduce regulation of international agro-businesses and of speculative activities on commodities trading;
- Promote corporate social responsibility and accountability in agro-industry,
- Build into agriculture resilience and adaptation to climate change, and
- Protect the environment.

The executive committee further calls on the WCC member churches to

1. ***Advocate actively*** with their governments, intergovernmental organizations and international financial institutions for the implementation of the above.
2. ***Renew their commitment*** to work for genuine land reform – including the redistribution of church lands, institutional practices, demonstrating practical models of life-giving agriculture such as community based organic farming in church lands.
3. ***Review their own institutional practices***, lift up, promote and replicate practical models of life-giving agriculture (e.g., community-based, organic farming, especially in church lands.)
4. ***Promote local and environmentally friendly agricultural production through support for:***
 - Community seed banks and appropriate household food reserve systems,
 - Direct relationships between producers and consumers and
 - All efforts of awareness-building in local communities and congregations on the global food crisis through education and ecumenical formation and relevant Bible study materials.
5. ***Link up*** with peasant movements, Indigenous Peoples, women's groups and disabled persons in designing other proposals for advancing the right to food and food sovereignty through the World Social Forum and other spaces.
6. ***Find ways*** of accessing studies on the social and environmental effects of a moratorium on agro-fuel expansion that can help churches in their work in this area.

- **Statement by WCC general secretary on the global financial crisis, 14 November 2008**

A call for a new international financial architecture

The World Council of Churches and the overall ecumenical family are deeply concerned with the current global financial system which has continued to generate poverty and create massive unemployment. On November 15 the leaders of 20 nations and the major multilateral financial institutions will gather behind closed doors in Washington, D.C. to attempt to fix the current crisis by remaking the rules of global finance. This group includes many of the people, governments and institutions whose policies are responsible for the current financial meltdown. It has been dubbed "Bretton Woods II". The WCC is concerned about the effectiveness of such a meeting limited to a small portion of the world's countries, when the issue involves drawing up a new financial architecture in the 21st century.

The crises that accentuate the current global financial system (debt crisis, sub-prime mortgage crisis, currency crisis, banking crisis and capital market crashes) have now been particularly severe in industrial countries while their effect is spreading rapidly to developing countries. The US economy contracted by 0.3 percent between July and September, the biggest drop in GDP since 2001. For the first time in 16 years, the UK's

gross domestic product sank by 0.5 percent during the same period. Germany is now officially in recession and the rest of the Euro-zone countries and Japan are thought to be already in recession.

Consumer spending in major economies is down sharply, while unemployment is up. The US shed 760,000 jobs in the first nine months of the year, while 164,000 people lost their jobs in the UK between June and August. These figures are expected to rise, and many other OECD countries are also bracing for significant job losses. According to the UN general secretary, this crisis is threatening the achievement of the Millennium development goals that calls for 16 billion US dollars. Efforts to avert climate change and financing for development are now in danger of reduced financing. This global crisis demands participation of all, not only a few, governments.

This problem has resulted in a variety of inconclusive debates on how to bring about an international financial reform. The industrial countries continued to define austerity measures as a panacea for poor countries instead of addressing the failure of the whole system. This was a time when the industrial countries remained stable and prosperous. The time has come now to address this issue seriously. Economists differ regarding the causes but it is a fact that history is punctuated by financial crises while the evolution of the international regulatory framework has not kept pace with the globalization of financial markets. In other words, the fact that the industrial countries were secure should neither deter efforts for drawing a global regulatory framework nor give an impression that industrial countries will regain their prosperity and be secure with mere cosmetic short term reforms while global financial inequality is ignored and left to be solved by markets alone.

The ambition of the upcoming G20 meeting is rather low. With the host of the meeting leaving the White House in January, a divergence of perspectives on what should be done to fix the financial crisis, and the lack of solid and inspiring proposals on how to reform the financial system, a 5-hour meeting could at best be a crisis management summit. It is therefore unlikely that the G20 meeting will effectively address the questions; it is more likely that the meeting will result in further inadequate actions by financial institutions that fail to deal with financial volatility, nor will they succeed in designing guidelines for just and stable system for all countries and peoples. The WCC has always called for the need for a financial architecture which will qualitatively regulate the growth in massive movements of capital. To achieve this change, a solid process that takes on board all global actors and civil society is imperative. Civil society groups and many governments have called for a process that is much more inclusive of other nations and the peoples of those nations.

The need for a new international financial architecture

The global financial meltdown — with the U.S economy at its epicentre — has, more than anything else, debunked the neo-liberal economic myth that deregulated financial markets are "efficient". In 2005, the WCC background document on Alternative Globalization Addressing People and Earth (AGAPE) observed: "No international financial institution...is able or willing to control the USD 1.9 trillion worth of currencies that are traded every day. Financial speculation dominates trade in goods and services,

diverting resources from long-term productive investments and areas of greatest need. Financial markets are also increasingly unstable, with speculative bubbles and financial crises." The problems of external debt and capital flight as well as the recent bail-out of troubled banks and insurance institutions in the US and Europe — an amount exceeding that needed to eradicate poverty around the world, make exceedingly clear that the prevailing international financial system is one based on injustice: it is a system wherein the global poor are essentially subsidizing the rich. It also imperils previous international pledges of financial support for addressing the food crisis and climate change mitigation and adaptation in poor countries. It is therefore patent that nothing less than a paradigm shift is needed.

Our churches and the wider ecumenical family are called to intensify their advocacy work at various levels calling their governments to push for a new international financial architecture. Such a process should be inclusive observing the following proposals:

- Debates on new financial architecture should include representatives of all developing countries and members from the civil society including religious communities;
- Deter excessive, destabilizing currency speculation by strengthening regulatory institutions;
- Give national and regional central banks more control over monetary policy;
- Develop a multilateral approach on common standards to define the tax base to minimize tax avoidance opportunities for both transnational corporations (TNCs) and international investors;
- Establish a multilateral agreement to allow states to tax TNCs on a global unitary basis, with appropriate mechanisms to allocate tax revenues internationally;
- Support for the proposal for an International Convention to facilitate the recovery and repatriation of funds illegally appropriated from national treasury of poor countries;
- Creatively, with the civil society and faith communities, work out an innovative system in which justice can be central in all global financial transactions.
- Create, within the auspices of the UN an arbitration mechanism to resolve problems of debt.
- Apply a Currency Transaction Tax to curb short-term volatility of capital movements and exchange rates.
- Set a process of democratizing all global finance and trade institutions.

The search for international solutions for the unjust financial system could be complemented by national efforts to control financial markets. It is necessary to take seriously the danger of foreign financial dependence. During the earlier period of dramatic financial volatility, when banking crashes, foreign world debt defaults and stock market collapses were common, John Maynard Keynes responded:

“I sympathize with those who would minimize, rather than those who would maximize, economic entanglement among nations. Ideas, knowledge, science, hospitality, travel—these are things which should of their nature be international. But let goods be homespun

whenever it is reasonably and conveniently possible and above all, let finance be primarily national.”

Keynes, the leading economist of the 20th century, was not merely advocating nation-state control of finance because of concerns over volatility. At stake was nothing less than economic policy sovereignty. Implied in his statement was that the whole management of the domestic economy depends upon being free to have the appropriate interest rate without reference to the rate prevailing in the rest of the world. Capital controls is a corollary to this. These insights apply equally to lower and middle income countries today, as to Britain during the 1930s. De-globalization of finance therefore represents a serious and laudable financial situation, as opposed to chaotic, destructive and self-contradictory international financial flows, in part by restoring national sovereignty via capital controls. Realistically, there must be a dramatic change in how domestic finances are raised, lent and spent which requires envisaging how international financial power relations can be radically and feasibly overhauled—simply so as to open the space for the reclamation of national financial sovereignty.

Rev. Dr Samuel Kobia
WCC general secretary

- **Opening address by WCC general secretary at conference on Confronting the Global Food Challenge, Geneva, Switzerland, 24 November 2008**

Global food crisis has a spiritual dimension, says Kobia

For one billion of the world population, "living with constant hunger" is "a normal state". However, there is nothing normal about that fact, which is "a result of the ways our societies have chosen to produce, share, buy and sell food".

WCC general secretary Samuel Kobia made these remarks in welcoming participants to the conference "Confronting the global food challenge," which is taking place 24-26 November at the Ecumenical Centre in Geneva, Switzerland. Olivier de Schutter, the UN special rapporteur on the right to food, and Pascal Lamy, the director general of the World Trade Organization, are expected to address the conference.

According to Kobia, the current food crisis is "an appalling indictment of our broken food system". Its "primary cause" lies on greed-driven, "inappropriate human actions which have induced climate change and skyrocketing food prices". Thus the broken food system does not only represent an economic and political crisis, but also a spiritual one. "As churches we know we must take action on all these levels."

As "having enough to eat is, and has always been, central to the Christian idea of a world shaped by justice and mercy," it is clear that – in the words of Lutheran World Federation

general secretary Ishmael Noko – "ensuring people have access to adequate food cannot be left to the mercy of the markets".

Instead, the WCC calls for "a life-giving agriculture that nurtures the earth and provides nutritious and affordable food for all people," as well as for "the participation of small farmers in the production of food, and for the just distribution of food resources".

A broad group of civil society organizations are participating at the conference "Confronting the global food challenge," which was initiated by the Ecumenical Advocacy Alliance (EAA), FoodFirst Information and Action Network and the Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy.

- **Call co-issued by WCC for NGOs, trade unions and social movements to sign onto a new economic and social model as an alternative to the present one, Belem, Brazil, 1 February 2009**

**For a new economic and social model
Let's put finance in its place!²⁴**

The financial crisis is a systemic crisis that emerges in the context of global crises (climate, food, energy, social...) and of a new balance of power. It results from 30 years of transfer of income from labour towards capital. This tendency should be reversed. This crisis is the consequence of a capitalist system of production based on *laissez-faire* and fed by short term accumulation of profits by a minority, unequal redistribution of wealth, natural resource plunder and the privatization of public services. This crisis affects the whole humanity, first of all the most vulnerable (workers, jobless, farmers, migrants, women...) and Southern countries, which are the victims of a crisis for which they are not at all responsible.

The resources to get out of the crisis merely burden the public with the losses in order to save, with no real public benefit, a financial system that is at the root of the current cataclysm. Where are the resources for the populations which are the victims of the crisis? The world not only needs regulations, but also a new paradigm which puts the financial system at the service of a new international democratic system based on the satisfaction of human rights, decent work, food sovereignty, respect for the environment, cultural diversity, the social and solidarity economy and a new concept of wealth. Therefore, we demand to:

²⁴ This call is the result of a series of seminars at the World Social Forum 2009 in Belem, which involved among others : Action Aid, Attac, BankTrack, CADTM, CCFD, CEDLA, CNCD, CRID, Eurodad, Global alternatives Forum, IBON, International WG on Trade-Finance Linkages, LATINDADD, Networkers South-North, NIGD, SOMO, Tax Justice Network, Transform!, OWINFS, War on Want, World Council of Churches.

- Put a reformed and democratized United Nations at the heart of the financial system reform, as the G20 is not the legitimate forum to resolve this systemic crisis.
- Establish international permanent and binding mechanisms of control over capital flows.
- Implement an international monetary system based on a new system of reserves, including the creation of regional reserve currencies in order to end the current supremacy of the dollar and to ensure international financial stability.
- Implement a global mechanism of state and citizen control of banks and financial institutions. Financial intermediation should be recognized as a public service that is guaranteed to all citizens in the world.
- Prohibit hedge funds and over the counter markets, where derivatives and other toxic products are exchanged without any public control.
- Eradicate speculation on commodities, first of all food and energy, by implementing public mechanisms of price stabilization.
- Dismantle tax havens, sanction their users (individuals, companies, banks and financial intermediates) and create an international tax organization to combat tax competition and evasion.
- Establish a new international system of wealth sharing by implementing a progressive tax system at the national level and by creating global taxes (on financial transactions, polluting activities and high income) to finance global public goods.

We call on NGOs, trade unions and social movements to converge in order to create a citizen struggle in favour of this new model. We urge them to mobilize all over the world, in particular in the face of the G20, from March 28th onwards.

- **CCIA says global financial crisis represents the opportunity to deeply transform the international financial system for good, Matanzas, Cuba, 15-20 March 2009**

Will the global financial crisis mark the end of "moneytheism"?

No doubt the global financial crisis is and will continue impacting negatively all regions of the world, but according to an advisory body of the World Council of Churches (WCC) it also represents an opportunity to deeply transform the international financial system for good.

For Christians there is more to the economic crisis than meets the eye. For the WCC Commission of the Churches on International Affairs (CCIA), there is a spiritual perspective on the crisis according to which it is necessary – with God's grace – to overcome greed and "moneytheism". People need to rethink and change their lifestyles so that everyone may have life with dignity within a context of respect for the creation.

On a concrete implementation level, what is needed, according to the CCIA, is to build a more democratic and participatory financial system under the United Nations. This system would need to be less dependent on only one currency in the world, as well as to create new ways of solidarity among states and peoples. The financial crisis, however, cannot be seen in isolation but as intertwined with the current energy, food and climate crises.

The commission discussed the global financial crisis at its 15-20 March meeting in Matanzas, Cuba. The 30-strong commission provides WCC member churches and affiliated ecumenical organizations with a platform for information-sharing and joint advocacy on critical situations and on opportunities to support initiatives for peacemaking, justice and overcoming poverty.

- **Letter to the Rt. Hon. Gordon Brown MP and leaders of G20 countries regarding the Global Economic and Financial Crisis, 27 March 2009**

Your Excellency,

The World Council of Churches (WCC) has been observing with deep concern the current global financial and economic crisis that has led to increased unemployment, indebtedness and poverty world-wide.

At the outset, the WCC considers this crisis as not merely a financial and economic one but as a crisis that has moral and ethical dimensions that have slowly been eroding our societies over a period of time. We are witnessing an era when greed has become the basis for economic growth. It is therefore necessary, in the understanding of the churches, to go beyond short term financial bailout actions and to seek long term transformation based on sound ethical and moral principles which will govern a new financial architecture. The WCC has been expressing its concern on this since 1984, when it had issued a call for a new international financial order based on ethical principles and social justice.

We believe it is time, once again, for such a transformation of the financial and economic systems based on values of honesty, social justice and dignity for all. While I appreciate the prompt actions taken by the G20 beginning with its meeting in Washington D.C. in November 2008 to salvage the system and prevent it from collapse, we would like to raise issues that need to be taken into account in transforming the current system.

As noted by some G20 leaders this crisis has provided us with an opportunity to analyse collectively how to come up with a system that is not only sustainable but that is just and ethical. Governments are indicating that they will act decisively to stimulate global demand and to preserve the stability of the financial sector. It looks like a complete meltdown of the financial system has been prevented as noted recently by Hon. Angela

Merkel, the Chancellor of Germany and Hon. Jan Peter Balkenende, the Prime Minister of the Netherlands.

Our concern is that, there is need to go beyond preventing the short term collapse of the system. What we need are brave and new measures to correct this unjust and unethical system in order to prevent such a crisis from occurring once again in the future. We believe that current financial and economic institutions need drastic transformation to avoid a repeat.

It is possible today to push for radical changes because international opinion and the commitment to cooperation are favourable. There is a spirit of shared responsibility. However, for such a transformation to be successful and sustainable, this debate should become part of the agenda of the United Nations where all countries are participants.

We do support the view that apart from the discussion on how to bring our economies back into a robust growth path, the challenge to be faced at the April G20 meeting is to build a new financial architecture that meets 21st century requirements. The need of the hour is to construct a system in which market forces are checked through ethical regulations and oversight, but also by a framework of common values that sets clear limits to excessive and irresponsible actions based on greed.

We welcome and consider significant the proposal of Hon. Merkel and Hon. Balkenende for a global charter for sustainable Economic Activity, aimed at developing a single framework relying on the unfolding of market forces but striving to ensure a stable, socially balanced, and sustainable development of the global economy. To this we add the need to ensure that this charter is grounded on ethical principles and that it is formulated on a participatory basis involving all countries in the United Nations.

But more importantly, the churches believe that fighting global poverty, the food crisis and climate change should be given the same attention as salvaging the financial meltdown.

Based on the above, allow me to outline, on behalf of the churches, some proposals for the G20 to take into consideration at the London meeting in April as well as at the UN General Assembly in May 2009.

1. That this crisis is an opportunity for the international community to create a new financial architecture to be developed under the aegis of the United Nations where broad participation of all countries and the civil society could take place. The G20 discussion should therefore prepare the way for a fuller discussion at the May UN General Assembly debate on the issue.
2. Set a process for democratization of all global finance and trade institutions.
3. Deter destabilizing currency speculation by transforming and strengthening regulatory institutions.
4. Develop a practice of ethics and social justice that can guide financial markets in the world.

5. Establish international, permanent and binding mechanisms of control over capital flows and capital flight.
 6. Implement an international monetary system based on a new system of reserves, including the creation of regional reserve currencies in order to end the current supremacy of the US dollar and to ensure international financial stability.
 7. Prohibit hedge funds and over the counter markets, where derivatives and other toxic products are exchanged, without public control.
 8. Eradicate speculation on commodities, primarily on food and energy, by creating public mechanisms that will monitor speculative behaviour.
 9. Dismantle tax havens, bring the users to justice (individuals, companies, banks and financial intermediaries) and create an international tax organization to combat tax competition and evasion.
 10. Establish a new international system of wealth sharing by creating a system of global taxes (on financial transactions, polluting activities and high income) to finance global public goods.
 11. Cancel illegitimate debt and address unsustainable debts of impoverished countries and establish a system of democratic, accountable, fair sovereign borrowing and lending that serves sustainable and equitable development.
 12. Ensure that this crisis will not lead to the reduction of the Official Development Aid (ODA) to poor countries, nor adversely affect the Millennium Development Goals.
- The essence of a new global financial architecture should be to connect finance and real economy.

It is my hope that you will take these important proposals into your deliberations and that your meeting will also not only invite emerging market countries but poor countries as well since they are even more deeply impacted by the crisis. We shall appreciate to receive a response as to how our proposals were taken into account.

We offer you our prayers for a successful and constructive meeting.

Yours sincerely,
 Rev. Dr Samuel Kobia
 General secretary

CC H.E. Mr Ban Ki-moon, UN secretary general
 H.E. Mr Miguel d'Escoto Brockmann, president of the 63rd session of the United Nations General Assembly

- **Letter from WCC general secretary to H.E. Father Miguel d'Escoto Brockmann, president of the 63rd session of the United Nations General Assembly regarding the global financial crisis, 1 April 2009**

Your Excellency,

Re: The global financial crisis

The World Council of Churches (WCC) is profoundly concerned about the current global financial and economic crisis, which has exacerbated chronic problems of poverty, joblessness and indebtedness worldwide.

Although the crisis did not originate from the developing world, economically-weak nations and people living in poverty – already reeling from the effects of the food and climate crises – continue to bear a disproportionate burden of the consequences of the ensuing crisis. As an urgent priority measure, churches support the call for significant space for developing economies to protect and expand social spending as well as implement social protection policies for the more marginalized sectors of our societies. Gender-just social protection programmes must form an important part of the immediate response to the crisis, including national fiscal stimulus packages.

According to the understanding of the churches, however, the current crisis is not merely financial and economic. It is deeply a moral and ethical issue. In the current era of financial globalization, economic expansion has been more and more driven by greed. Increasingly, we have continued to rely on models of finance and economics that subordinate progress and well-being of the people to the mere generation of money; these models are also largely oblivious to the social and environmental costs of financial and economic decisions. It has come as no surprise then that today we are confronted with financial, food and climate crises.

Clearly, it is essential to go beyond short-term financial bailout actions aimed at salvaging the system and preventing it from collapse. And apart from measures to bring our economies back into a robust growth path, we must begin to pursue long-term and deep-seated changes based on sound moral and ethical principles which must govern a new financial architecture. The WCC has been expressing this point as far back as 1984, when it issued a call for a new international financial order. This call was reiterated by churches in the aftermath of the 1997-1998 Asian financial crisis and in the various United Nations meetings on financing for development.

We believe that a meaningful transformation of our financial and economic systems can be delayed no longer. The current crisis provides us with a crucial opportunity to collectively construct an international financial architecture that:

- is more fundamentally grounded on a framework of common values – honesty, social justice and human dignity for all;
- accounts for social and environmental risks in financial and economic calculations;
- reconnects finance to the real economy; and
- sets clear limits to, as well as, penalises excessive and irresponsible actions based on greed.

It is incumbent upon world leaders to push for these radical changes. In the face of what is turning out to be truly global financial and economic crisis, there is now a growing and

sobering awareness of our common vulnerability. And we are hopeful that this recognition is bringing forth, among civil society, governments, international institutions and other stakeholders, a spirit of shared responsibility and commitment that is required of us all in meeting both the short-term and long-term challenges posed by the crisis.

We further believe that the United Nations has a key role to play in facilitating and enabling transformation of the world's financial and economic systems. The critical debate on building a sustainable and just international financial architecture must indeed be a main concern of the United Nations, where broad participation of all countries and the civil society could take place. We thus appreciate your call to the United Nations General Assembly for a "High-level Conference on the Global Financial and Economic crisis and its Impacts on Development", which will take place in June 2009. Moreover, we welcome the recently-released report entitled "Recommendations by the Commission of Experts of the President of the General Assembly on Reforms of the International Monetary and Financial System", which takes into account some of our more specific suggestions as outlined in the latter part of this letter.

In particular, we consider noteworthy the report's proposal to establish a Global Economic Council (GEC) to "promote development, secure consistency and coherence in the policy goals of the major international organizations and support consensus building among governments on efficient and effective solutions for issues of global economic governance". We believe that if the GEC is to succeed at all, then it must be truly buttressed by democratic principles. Or else there is a tremendous danger that the GEC will become yet another elite forum for setting the agenda for worldwide financial and economic policy.

As the General Assembly deliberates on responses to the crisis, the proposed GEC and other reforms to the international financial system at the high-level conference on 26-29 May 2009, we would like to share, on behalf of the churches, some proposals which we trust and hope will be considered during the discussions:

1. Set a process for democratization of all global finance and trade institutions.
2. Deter destabilising currency speculation by transforming and strengthening regulatory institutions.
3. Develop a practice of ethics and justice that can guide financial markets in the world.
4. Establish international permanent and binding mechanisms of control over capital flows and capital flight.
5. Design an international monetary system based on a new system of reserves, including the creation of regional reserve currencies in order to end the current supremacy of the US dollar and to ensure international financial stability.
6. Prohibit hedge funds and over-the-counter markets, where derivatives and other toxic products are exchanged, without public control.
7. Eradicate speculation on commodities, primarily on food and energy, by creating public mechanisms that will monitor speculative behaviour.

8. Dismantle tax havens, sanction their users (individuals, companies, banks and financial intermediaries) and create an international tax organization to combat tax competition and evasion.
9. Establish a new international system of wealth sharing by creating a mechanism for global taxes (on financial transactions, polluting activities and high income) to finance global public goods.
10. Cancel illegitimate debt; address unsustainable debts of impoverished countries; and establish a system of democratic, accountable, fair sovereign borrowing and lending that serves sustainable and equitable development.
11. Ensure that this crisis will not lead to the reduction of the official development aid to poor countries.

We look forward to receiving a response as to how our proposals were taken into account.

And we offer you our prayers and wishes for a successful and constructive meeting.

Yours sincerely,
Rev. Dr Samuel Kobia
General secretary
cc General Assembly of the United Nations

- **Joint action alert sent to H. E. Ban Ki-moon, secretary general of the United Nations, on the occasion of the launching of a global campaign on food to overcome hunger and to improve livelihoods in harmony with creation and social justice, 11 May 2009**

Your Excellency:

We are writing to you as religious leaders and leaders of faith-based organizations all over the world who on this day are launching a global campaign on food in order to overcome hunger and to improve livelihoods in harmony with creation and social justice.

For the whole of humanity, access to adequate, safe, and nutritious food has always formed one of the foundations of a just, peaceful and sustainable world. This vision stands in contrast to the reality of a world in which nearly a billion people lack such access. This brutal injustice is underlined when we consider that at this moment we already produce enough nutritious food to feed everyone on the planet. How we produce food, how we distribute it and how we ensure that all people have access to culturally-appropriate nourishment is a fundamental matter of justice towards all people.

As you are well aware, the world faces acute crises today – manifested in the severity of the economic crisis, sharp increases and very volatile prices of food, and documented effects from climate change. These crises are interlinked and will have a severe impact on the most vulnerable groups in the developing countries.

Although the multiple crises have been acknowledged by international and national bodies, the responses most often proposed are woefully inadequate. Our systems for producing, buying, selling and sharing food are profoundly broken, and more of the same will not help. We need to recognize that policies and practices of governments, international organizations and agribusiness have been central parts of the problem and we must accept that hunger is being caused by fractures in the structure of our global society. The good news is that, working together, we can change these policies, practices and structures.

Foundational to our approach is the right to food, which resonates with our biblical understandings of justice that all people have access to the means and ability to procure sufficient and nutritious food for themselves without sacrificing other fundamental rights such as housing, education and health. We believe all governments are required to ensure the right to food is protected and fulfilled. These are fundamental steps to reaching the Millennium Development Goals to eradicate extreme poverty and halve the proportion of people who suffer from hunger by 2015.

We are writing to express our appreciation for your call to include the right to food as the “third pillar” within the Comprehensive Framework for Action (along with food assistance and safety nets, and the improvement of small holder agriculture). Your call on governments at the High Level Meeting on Food Security for All in Madrid (27 January 2009) to recognize the central role of the right to food – as the basis for analysis, action and accountability was a sign of strong leadership.

We write now to ask that you ensure this vision is converted into practical and tangible action.

The four year campaign we launch today, will mobilize people all over the world through their churches and Christian organizations to advocate for:

- Just food production systems
- Just and sustainable consumption
- Realization of the right to food for all people

“Give us this day our daily bread” is a petition repeated by millions of Christians around the world every day as they pray the Lord’s Prayer. This prayer, surrounded by the Biblical narrative that calls us to care for humanity and all of Creation, leads us to provide food to those who are in immediate and dire need, and simultaneously work to expose and eradicate the causes of hunger.

Be assured of our support of efforts to realize the right to food and to reflect on, critique, and act against the systems that lead to pervasive and debilitating hunger.

- **Joint written statement made at the United Nations Human Rights Council's eleventh session strongly supporting the process of developing guiding principles on extreme poverty and human rights, June 2009**

Draft guiding principles on extreme poverty and human rights

We, the NGOs signatory to this statement, strongly support the process to develop Guiding Principles on Extreme Poverty and Human Rights and believe that the current financial and economic crisis highlights the urgent need for such a tool that lays out a human rights based approach to tackling extreme poverty.

Every day, the situation of those already living in extreme poverty is becoming even more untenable and every day, more and more people are falling into extreme poverty in both the North and the South. Several of the organizations that prepared this statement are in daily contact with those subjected to such inhumane conditions and thus can give direct testimony to the dehumanizing and debilitating impact of extreme poverty.

Extreme poverty is one of the most serious human rights challenges for the international community. It is both a cause and a consequence of multiple human rights violations. The international community must make it a priority to address this situation and work towards the creation of a tailored response to the human rights violations of those living in extreme poverty and the obstacles they face in the realization of their rights. The Draft Guiding Principles (DGPs), based on existing human rights norms should be a key instrument in this direction.

The tragic situation of all those living in extreme poverty requires Members of the Human Rights Council to take action on this issue as a matter of priority. We feel that the very constructive consultations that have taken place on the DGPs constitute a step in the right direction. The January 2009 technical seminar suggested inter alia that they be operational, action-oriented, accessible, and with language and terms conforming more systematically with existing international human rights law. The seminar also confirmed that the DGPs should focus on persons living in extreme poverty in *all* countries of the world. Regular consultation should continue until the final drafting stage with the full participation of NGOs, especially those in which people in situations of extreme poverty express their views. If revised in this spirit, the DGPs will provide governments at the national and local levels, and international bodies a comprehensive guide for the development of new policies and programmes that have the potential to ensure that the rights of children and their parents are met, and thus break the vicious cycle of inter-generational transmission of extreme poverty.

The finalization and adoption of these DGPs is critical because:

- A. The DGPs are based on the indivisibility, interdependence, and universality of human rights and thus confirm the importance of a multi-pronged human rights based approach to extreme poverty.
- B. The DGPs emphasize that it is important for services and programmes to reach all members of society and not just those who are easiest to reach.

- C. The DGPs aim to foster and promote the participation of people living in extreme poverty in the planning, implementation and evaluation of all policies which concern them. Building on the experience of those who are the most concerned helps to ensure the effectiveness of anti-poverty strategies.
- D. The formulation of a common framework will also help to harmonise action, improve partnerships at all levels and build the foundation for efficient and effective multi-stakeholder dialogue.

We believe the improvement, adoption and implementation of the DGPs should be seen as a priority by all relevant stakeholders, bearing in mind the seriousness and tragic impact of extreme poverty. We look forward to the emergence of consensus on the DGPs and their recognition as an efficient and valuable tool providing practical guidance and facilitating the effective implementation of existing human rights norms in the context of extreme poverty.

We strongly support the draft resolution tabled by the Permanent Mission of France, which requests the Independent Expert on Human Rights and Extreme Poverty to revise the text based on the comments received during the consultations and to present a new draft to the Human Rights Council.

The Independent Expert possesses both the necessary expertise and credibility to effectively revise the text, continue to carry out consultations with all stakeholders – including those living in extreme poverty – and promote consensus amongst them. In addition, over two years of consultations have already provided a wealth of valuable suggestions that need to be forged into a new revised version.

We call on the Human Rights Council to continue to support fully the process to develop Guiding Principles on Extreme Poverty and Human Rights and to mandate the Independent Expert on Extreme Poverty and Human Rights to revise the draft text in line with consultations undertaken.

- **Statement on just finance and the economy of life adopted by WCC central committee, Geneva, Switzerland, 26 August–2 September 2009**

And Jesus said to them, “Take care! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; for one’s life does not consist in the abundance of possessions.”
(Luke 12:15 NRSV)

1. The World Council of Churches (WCC) first articulated its concerns about finance and economics in 1984 when it issued a call for a new international order based on ethical principles and social justice. In 1998, the WCC assembly in Harare mandated a study on economic globalization together with member churches. WCC worked closely with the World Alliance of Reformed Churches, the Lutheran World

Federation, Aprovech and other specialized ministries. Out of this, the Alternative Globalization Addressing People and earth (AGAPE) process, which was set up to further study the topics of poverty, wealth and ecology, was born. During the course of this process, several issues relating to various crises were identified: climate change and the food, social, and financial crises. In May 2009, the WCC convened a meeting of the Advisory Group on Economic Matters (AGEM) to (1) discern what is at stake in the current financial architecture, (2) propose a process that could lead to a new financial architecture and (3) outline the theological and ethical basis for such a new architecture.

2. Jesus warns that “You cannot serve both God and wealth” (Luke 16:13 NRSV). We, however, witness greed manifested dramatically in the financial and economic systems of our times. The current financial crisis presents an opportunity to re-examine our engagement and action. It is an opportunity for us to discern together how to devise a system that is not only sustainable but that is just and moral. Economics is a matter of faith and has an impact on human existence and all of creation.
3. The financial system of recent times has shaped the world more than ever before. However, by becoming the engine of virtual growth and wealth, it has enriched some people but has harmed many more, creating poverty, unemployment, hunger and death; widening the gap between rich and poor; marginalizing certain groups of people; eroding the whole meaning of human life; and destroying ecosystems. There is a growing and sobering awareness of our common vulnerability and of the limits of our current way of life. Today’s global financial crisis, which originated in the richest parts of our world, points to the immorality of a system that glorifies money and has a dehumanizing effect by encouraging acquisitive individualism. The resulting greed-based culture impoverishes human life, erodes the moral and ecological fabric of human civilization, and intoxicates our psyche with materialism. The crisis we face is, at the same time, both systemic and moral. Those most affected are: women, who bear a disproportionate share of the burden; young people and children, as doubts are raised and their sense of security for the future is eroded; and those living in poverty, whose suffering deepens.
4. In an era of financial globalization, economic expansion has been increasingly driven by greed. This greed, a hallmark of the current financial system, causes and intensifies the sacrifice and suffering of impoverished human beings, while the wealthy classes multiply their riches. Finance is, at best, the lubricant of real economic activities. However, we note that money is not wealth; it has no inherent value outside the human mind. When it is turned into a series of fictitious instruments to create ever more financial wealth it is increasingly divorcing itself from the real economy, thereby creating only virtual or phantom wealth that does not produce anything to meet real human needs.
5. The abuse of global finance and trade by international businesses costs developing countries more than \$160 billion a year in lost tax revenues – undermining desperately needed public expenditures. Developing countries are lending their

reserves to industrial countries at very low interest rates and are borrowing back at higher rates. This results in a net transfer of resources to reserve currency countries that exceed more than ten times the value of foreign assistance, according to the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). This global financial crisis is proving the bankruptcy of the neoliberal doctrine, as promoted by the International Financial Institutions through the “Washington Consensus”. The leaders of the rich countries that had promoted the consensus so emphatically, declared it “over” at the G20 meeting in April 2009. And yet much of the G20’s agenda reflects misguided efforts to restore the same system of overexploitation of resources and unlimited growth. Furthermore, resources are channelled through the militarization of some societies, due to a perverse understanding of human security through military power.

6. Unfortunately, churches have also been complicit in this system, relying on popular models of finance and economics that prioritize generating money over the progress and well-being of humanity. These models are largely oblivious to the social and ecological costs of financial and economic decisions, and often lack moral direction. The challenge for churches today is to not retreat from their prophetic role. They are also challenged by their complicity with this speculative financial system and its embedded greed.
7. There are two structural elements of the current paradigm which must be changed. First, the economic motive of surplus value, unlimited growth and the irresponsible consumption of goods and natural resources contradict biblical values and make it impossible for societies to practice cooperation, compassion and love. Second, the system that privatizes productive goods and resources, disconnecting them from people’s work and needs and denying others access to and use of them is a structural obstacle to an economy of cooperation, sharing, love and dynamic harmony with nature. Alternative morality for economic activity is service/*koinonia* (fellowship) to human needs; human/social self-development; and people’s wellbeing and happiness. An alternative to the current property system is connected to need, use and work invested in the production and distribution process. In order to achieve this goal, the existing organizing principles of production and claims settlements (i.e., distribution) must change. This also warrants a situation where an ethical, just and democratic global financial architecture emerges and is grounded on a framework of common values: honesty, social justice, human dignity, mutual accountability and ecological sustainability. It should also account for social and ecological risks in financial and economic calculation; reconnect finance to the real economy; and set clear limits to, as well as penalize, excessive and irresponsible actions based on greed.
8. It is in this context that the central committee of the WCC acknowledges that a new ethos and culture which reflects the values of solidarity, common good and inclusion must, at this time of crisis, emerge to replace the anti-values of greed, individualism and exclusion. New indicators of progress, other than Gross Domestic Product, such as the Human Development Index, the Gross National Happiness (GNH) index and ecological footprints and other corresponding systems of accounting need to be evolved. For example, a GNH index that reflects the following values: 1) Quality and pattern of life; 2) Good governance (true democracy); 3) Education; 4) Health; 5)

Ecological resilience; 6) Cultural diversity; 7) Community vitality; 8) Balanced use of time; 9) Psychological and spiritual well-being.

9. The central committee of the WCC also emphasizes the need for a new paradigm of economic development and a re-conceptualization of wealth to include relationships, care and compassion, solidarity and love, aesthetics and the ethics of life, participation and celebration, cultural diversity and community vitality. This will involve responsible growth that recognizes human responsibility for creation and for future generations – an economy glorifying life.

In view of the need to support international organizations that are democratic, to represent all member nations of the United Nations (UN) and to affirm common values, the central committee of the WCC, meeting in Geneva, Switzerland, 26 August – 2 September 2009, calls upon governments to take the following necessary actions:

- A. **Adopt** new and more balanced indicators, such as the Gross National Happiness (GNH) index, to monitor global socio-environmental/ecological-economic progress.
- B. **Ensure** that resources are not diverted from basic education, public health, and poor countries.
- C. **Uphold** their commitments to and assistance for meeting the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), particularly the goal number 8 on cooperation world-wide.
- D. **Implement** gender-just social protection programs as an important part of national fiscal stimulus packages in response to the current financial crisis.
- E. **Emphasize** the participation of people and civil society organizations in policy-making processes, including the promotion of decentralized governance structures and participatory democracy.
- F. **Treat** finance also as a public service by making loans available to small and medium enterprises, farmers and particularly poor people through, for example, micro-financing in support of not-for-profit enterprises and the social economy.
- G. **Support** regional initiatives that decentralize finance and empower people in the global South to exercise control over their own development through such proposed bodies as the Bank of the South, the Asian Monetary Fund and the Bank of ALBA.
- H. **Revise** taxation systems, recognizing that tax revenues are ultimately the only sustainable source of development finances, by establishing an international accounting standard requiring country-by-country reporting of transnational companies' economic activities and taxes paid and by forging a multilateral agreement to set a mandatory requirement for the automatic exchange of tax information between all jurisdictions to prevent tax avoidance.
- I. **Explore** the possibility of establishing a new global reserve system based on a supranational global reserve currency and regional and local currencies.
- J. **Achieve** stronger democratic oversight of international financial institutions by making them subject to a UN Global Economic Council with the same status as the

UN Security Council.

- K. *Explore* the possibility of setting up a new international credit agency with greater democratic governance than currently exists under the Breton Woods institutions.
- L. *Set up* an international bankruptcy court with the authority to cancel odious and other kinds of illegitimate debts and to arbitrate other debt issues.
- M. *Regulate* and *reform* the credit agency industry into proper independent supervision institution(s), based on more transparency about ratings and strict regulation on the management of conflict of interest.
- N. *Use* innovative sources of finance, including carbon and financial transaction taxes, to pay for global public goods and poverty eradication.

- **Letter from WCC general secretary to the G20 leaders informing them of the central committee statement on “just finance and the economy of life”, 23 September 2009**

Your Excellency,

The World Council of Churches (WCC) has keenly followed and contributed to the G20 discussions on how to resolve the current global financial and economic crisis, including by way of a letter addressed to the G20 Chairman on the occasion of the London Summit (2 April 2009). On behalf of its fellowship of 349 churches worldwide, we also actively participated in United Nations (UN) Financing for Development process and in the historic UN Conference on the World Financial and Economic Crisis and its Impact on Development (24-26 June 2009). We welcome in particular the adoption by the UN General Assembly of Resolution A/63/305, which formally establishes an ad hoc open-ended Working Group to follow up on the issues contained in the Outcome Document of the June conference.

In early September, the WCC’s central committee, its highest governing body, issued a “Statement on Just finance and the Economy of Life”, denouncing “the immorality of a [greed-driven] system that glorifies money and has a dehumanizing effect” and at the same time recognising that the ongoing financial crisis “is an opportunity for us to discern together how to devise a system that is not only sustainable but that is just and moral”. (The full text is attached and can also be found at the following link: <http://www.oikoumene.org/en/resources/documents/central-committee/geneva-2009/reports-and-documents/report-on-public-issues/statement-on-just-finance-and-the-economy-of-life.html>.)

As the G20 meets in Pittsburgh, 24-25 September 2009 to assess the results of actions taken following the London Summit, the WCC and its member churches, urge the G20 governments to take into account the fundamental issues that we have outlined in the WCC statement. The WCC continues to assert that an ethical, just and democratic

international financial and economic architecture needs to be forged, not only to prevent future crises from recurring, but also to urgently address basic human needs and invest in social development and ecological sustainability.

We trust that the G20 governments will seriously take up the WCC statement, which puts forward concrete proposals, and consider it for action.

Yours sincerely,
Rev. Dr Samuel Kobia
General secretary

- **Statement of the conference “Churches for Water in Africa”, Entebbe, Uganda, 25 May 2007**

*“I was thirsty and you gave me
nothing to drink” Matthew 25, 42*

Convened by the Ecumenical Water Network (EWN) and hosted by the All Africa Conference of Churches (AACC) and the Uganda Joint Christian Council (UJCC), the “Churches for Water in Africa” Conference took place in Entebbe, Uganda from 21st to 25th May 2007, with participants representing churches, church-based organizations, faith based development agencies, and other civil society organizations from 19 African countries²⁵ as well as guests from Europe and Latin America. The purpose of the Conference was to deliberate on the water challenges in Africa, to exchange experiences on the water related development work and to share theological reflections on water and the role of the churches.

As churches and faith-based organizations we affirm water as the cradle and source of life, an expression of God’s grace in perpetuity for the whole of creation. We are called to exercise responsible stewardship for this unique trust, and to preserve and share it for the benefit of humanity and all creation. Further we share the following convictions: that access to water is a fundamental human right, that the protection and control of water resources is a central public responsibility, and that water must not be treated as a commodity but as an essential social good for the present and future generations. We recognize water as a sacred gift of God.

We have learnt from the experience of the 75 fellow participants, lectures and presentations, as well as from members of communities with whom we interacted during our visits to informal settlements in Kampala and rural communities in Masaka and Busoga.

We recognize that water is key to the livelihoods for communities, and the entry point for any development. Poverty can never be overcome, if the issue of water and sanitation is not adequately addressed.

We are deeply concerned that in spite of all promises made in the context of the Millennium Development Goals, in rural Africa 65% of the population still lack access to adequate water supply and 73% access to adequate sanitation. Lack of water and sanitation reinforces the cycle of poverty and therefore diminishes the chance to achieve any of the Millennium Development Goals. We concur with the UNDP Human Development Report 2006, that this situation is mainly due to lack of political will at governmental, intergovernmental and international financial institutions levels.

²⁵ Botswana, Burkina Faso, Burundi, Cameroon, Congo Brazzaville, Egypt, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Ghana, Kenya, Lesotho, Liberia, Mali, Rwanda, South Africa, Sudan, Tanzania, Uganda, and Zimbabwe.

We urge governments, in Africa and in the industrialized countries, as well as multilateral institutions to respect the human right to water and to respond to their respective obligations. Provision of water for all is possible – the way towards it passes through the prioritization of the poor and most excluded in water policies and funds allocation. The participation of these communities at all stages of intervention is not only a democratic imperative, but also a precondition for sustainability and prerequisite for peace. Our sharing experiences also revealed that water supply, sanitation and protection of environment, including watershed management, should never be separated but be worked on in a holistic way.

The Conference raised concerns about ongoing and potential conflicts over water at local, national and inter-state levels. Having discussed different experiences, for example the Nile, we express our conviction that water conflicts can be turned into signs of hope, if non-violent solutions are sought. This must be done together with the affected population, based on mutual respect for the right to water.

We are deeply troubled by the aggravating impact of climate change which threatens to further alter the water patterns in Africa. Climate change is already causing unpredictable rainfall, prolonged droughts, devastating floods, desertification and drying up of water sources. The existence and future of millions of people is jeopardized. We urge the industrialized countries to take their responsibility, and together with industrializing countries to start immediately to cut the emission of carbon dioxide, to put advanced alternative energy technology at the disposal of Africa and to assure funding for mitigation and adaptation measures in Africa, as well as in other affected regions of the Global South.

We call upon African governments and their institutions to follow a path to development, which protects the environment and gives sustainable options for peoples' future. One important step is to prioritise the just and sustainable provision of water to the poor and most excluded, and to make water and sanitation a strong component of national budgets and other financial allocations, including development aid.

We recognize and affirm communities' own initiatives, skills and knowledge in dealing with water scarcity, and therefore advocate for technologies that are appropriate and relevant to the cultures and contexts of the people. We further reiterate our commitment to strengthen our support and work with poor rural and urban communities in their endeavours to find sustainable supplies of water, the provision of safe sanitation, and to protect the environment. Equally, we reiterate our commitment for a people centred advocacy for the human right to water in our countries, as well as internationally, as part of the Ecumenical Water Network.

“Let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream.” Amos 5, 24

HEALTH

- **Participation of WCC general secretary at the International Women's Summit about HIV/AIDS, 4-7 July 2007**

Kobia calls for "Christ-centred approach" to HIV/AIDS, "with love as its language"

WCC General Secretary Rev. Dr Samuel Kobia has challenged his fellowmen to join the efforts of women, especially grandmothers, in dealing with the immune deficiency pandemic. During a panel at the International Women's Summit convened by the Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA) in partnership with the International Community of Women Living with HIV and AIDS (ICW) and other international organizations in Nairobi on 4-7 July, he declared that Christian doctrines should be "applied to edify life and not to condemn and judge."

After an appraisal of the considerable positive change reached during the last twenty years of ecumenical engagement with the issue, Kobia highlighted the necessity for religious men to "fully engage in the campaign for providing holistic and comprehensive prevention, care and treatment" to those affected by HIV and AIDS:

"It is not enough to preach from the pulpits of our religious communities. We have to be down on our knees, praying for strength to face the truth and then rise up and act positively!"

- **Aide Memoire from the Global Consultation on Genetics and New Biotechnologies and the Ministry of the Church, Johannesburg, South Africa, 2-5 December 2007**

*Make a joyful noise to the Lord all the earth.
Know that the Lord is God.
It is God who has made us and we are God's.
(Psalm 100: 1 and 3)*

Some 45 participants from all regions of the world sang and danced to a Kenyan song whose refrain repeated "Let us sing to the Lord". They wanted to remind themselves of the beauty and wonder of creation, even while confronting the stark challenges of new technologies. Only a few kilometers from Soweto and the Apartheid museum, in the opening session they heard the stark rejoinder "Biotechnology in many of its current applications like the apartheid system before it thrives on and leads to the indignity of persons and communities."

This consultation was hosted by the South African Council of Churches (SACC) acknowledging South Africa's role as a science and technology centre on the African continent. The initiative for the consultation grew simultaneously from the Canadian Council of Churches and the National Council of the Churches of Christ USA together with the World Council of Churches and the SACC. Envisioned as an opportunity for networking among concerned people, members of advocacy groups, theologians and scientists, representatives of churches and ecumenical partners, the consultation boldly faced the complexity of the issues born of scientific advance and commercial interests. The outcome of the consultation was diversity expressed as solidarity.

Convictions and perspectives

Genetic advances and new biotechnologies force the churches to reaffirm the dignity of human beings and the integrity of the web of life. The creativity of science needs to serve the common good. This note was a shared theme in all theological contributions to the consultation. Where the dignity is violated because human beings are reduced to mere commodities, churches are compelled to speak and act. Where the web of life threatened or disrupted by human intervention, churches will advocate for the restoration of just relationships between human beings and other life. Justice for the poor and the suffering creation is the compelling call to the Biblical witness.

The teachings of the churches need to be further developed in response to the challenges of biotechnology and the impact it has on peoples' lives. Underlying assumptions about the value and trajectory of life require deeper theological reflection. These are a common task that depends much on the contextual realities and benefits from shared discernment. Those closer to the centers of research and technological advance see the need for dialogue with scientists, wishing to move beyond a reactive mode. They also want to foster the science to serve the common humanity. Those who are closer to peasant communities and other marginalized groups underline their experience that communities can be devastated by the intrusion of genetically modified seeds and bio-piracy. They even conclude: "biotechnology now serves primarily to enhance corporate profit and thereby reduces human beings to mere consumers".

The context of unjust international relationships often blocks the capacity of people to find common ground. The consultation discovered that one of the most valuable resources to address this challenge can be found through the diverse and wide ranging perspectives. Commonly people from North and South find themselves in conflict because of the different realities they face. The solutions they look for are often seen as mutually exclusive because of the inequitable distribution of economic and political power. Networking and solidarity under these conditions are not just a matter between North and South. Full solidarity is as much a matter between South and South and North and North as it is between South and North. Hence the consultation's emphasized on networking and mutual accountability and the co-operation between the different ecumenical partners. The journey ahead will require a strong commitment to mutual accountability and candid encounter by all partners involved.

Valuing peoples and cultures

Indigenous Peoples have been guardians of biodiversity and cultivated many of the plants used for agriculture. Their knowledge is essential to future life and survival of humankind. This is not recognized. Instead, Mexico, though the heirs to 12000 years of a corn (maize) culture, come to face the risk of the demise of their culture. Long they told themselves, "The maize made people and people made the maize". Contamination of their fields through the illegal import and use of genetically modified corn and the dumping of surplus production is seriously undermining the lives and livelihoods of people, and more devastating still, their identity, spirituality and culture. The commodified crop has nothing in common with the sacred plant, the gift of creator God.

These themes were echoed again and again from the canola fields of Canada, to the sugar cane fields in the Caribbean, Africa and the Pacific, to those who struggle with the agro-export model of genetically modified soya in Latin America, and to 120,000 Bt cotton farmers who committed suicide in India because of crop failure. Violation of the human rights of farmers often hand in hand with violence against women and children and other groups was reported from many countries. Driven by the global market economy and unjust political systems, biotechnology promised increased production, but in the context of injustice and violence it results in increased dependency and threat to biodiversity. The new emphasis on agro-fuels threatens to further monocultures, expulsion of peasants, land speculation, pollution, and disease while raising food prices.

Urban and rural citizens have the right to access healthy food in keeping with their culture and therefore do not want to be reduced to mere consumers. This must always be at the heart of those among us who are engaged for the labeling of genetically modified products and the enforcement of regulatory frameworks in mobilizing the purchasing power of consumers. Even the exercise of consumer choice in favor of life must be seen as a privilege and operates within a framework that is hostile to these communities. Labeling of genetically modified products is only the second best choice in the absence of more fundamental justice.

Beyond the human species

Poor communities are more at risk during drug development — for example in clinical trials for HIV, reproductive technologies and diabetic research — and lack access to pharmaceutical products that are expensive under patent regimes and other legal, political and social machineries which prevent access to drugs. Perhaps the greatest arrogance to be confronted is any claim to "perfect" all life and in particular the human species. This irreverence denies the sacred relationship between creator and creatures. It ignores the vulnerability and finiteness of life. It opens the door for new divisions in human community that go far beyond the past and present experiences of racism, sexism, ableism and other deeply entrenched denials of human dignity. The commodification of human life in pre-natal diagnostics, some forms of research cloning and stem cell research as well as enhancement techniques must now increasingly be faced by churches and the wider public. Yet, even these are trumped by the dreams of so called trans-humanists. Their vision of constant perfection of human beings beyond the boundaries of

the species entails a nightmare not only for people with disabilities, but ultimately for all people.

The prophetic voice of the ecumenical community

There is a great need for global ecumenical literacy on the many dimensions of the new convergent technologies that have been enabled by the digitalization of information in different spheres of life. A central commitment of the consultation was the restoration of the churches' prophetic voices and public witness in the growing debate regarding the ethical use of genetics and biotechnologies. It was affirmed that theological reflection needs to be contextual and engaged in the transformation of the situation together with those most directly affected. But how to arrive at common voice of the ecumenical family in inter-contextual encounters describes well the task ahead and requires drawing deeply on different Christian traditions of practical wisdom and wisdom traditions in other faith communities. The kind of networking modeled here and to be pursued in the future can enable the churches and ecumenical partners to find their voice and speak their truth within local settings, in national and global advocacy and in a religiously pluralistic world.

The following steps agreed upon by the participants are first steps in fulfillment of these commitments. They are to be carried forward by sub-groups of the consultation:

- Education: Envisioned here is the development of a compendium of educational resources, which can be circulated to colleagues electronically; the development and maintenance of an electronic conversation on ongoing basis; the development of an ongoing network to be expanded as possible.
- Theological Discourse: The group explored the themes of anthropology, inter-contextual approach to doing theology, ecclesiological implications; exploring issues of unequal power distribution also in the ways they affect the discourse through the sharing of written materials and an ongoing consultative process (South-South, North-North, South-North); encouragement of learned societies to work on issues related to genetics and biotechnology in the widest possible sense including environmental issues. Public theology is a promising new avenue to inform the churches public witness.
- The ethics of embryonic stem cell research: the group pledged to follow developments in genetic research and its human applications, carefully reflecting on their theological implications and effects with each development.
- Genetically modified organisms in agriculture: support the proposal of a commercial moratorium on the export and import of agro-fuels; greater emphasis on the alternative framework of sustainable/life-giving agriculture and the need to modify our energy consumption patterns as the main way to address climate change and the water scarcity crisis through networking among participants and other partners; strict standards for the planting and trans-border trade of GMO products; protect the human rights of the farmers that are being affected by

monoculture GMO crops and also the economic violence they are subjected to and resulting in migration and hunger.

- Converging technologies: exchange of materials on nano-, bio-, information-, cognitive technologies and synthetic biology and sharing of information with the group as a whole.
- Advocacy, locally and globally: intentional efforts to improve the impact of multi-faceted political intervention through greater cross-sectoral and cross-regional sharing of information, models and practices; improving the churches capacity for public witness through co-operation with civil society actors and ethical and theological reflection provided by other groups in the network.

Participants of the consultation evoked the theme of the 2006 Assembly of the World Council of Churches in praying together: "Heal us. God in your grace, transform the world."

- **Minute on 'health for all', adopted by WCC executive committee, Lübeck, Germany, 23-26 September 2008**

Background

1. In September 1978 – thirty years ago – the *International Conference on Primary Health Care* took place in Alma-Ata, USSR (Kazakhstan) and brought together 134 World Health Organization (WHO) member states, 67 United Nations organizations, specialized ministries and non-governmental organizations. They issued an urgent call to all governments, health and development workers, and the world community to protect and promote the health for all people and adopted a prophetic declaration which remains more than relevant still today. The conference strongly recognized the existence of gross inequality in the health status around the world, particularly between developed and developing countries, as unacceptable and therefore, of common concern to all countries. The promotion and protection of the health for all was identified as essential to sustained economic and social development and to contributing to better quality of life and world peace. *Primary health care* was highlighted as the key to attaining this target as part of development in the spirit of social justice.
2. The churches and church-related pioneers in health have been recognized as key players in the development of the concept of Primary Health Care.
3. Since the 19th century and for over a hundred years, medical work has been one of the main focuses for Christian missionary work. Because of this, by the 1960's, thousands of Christian hospitals served the health care needs of the developing world. With the shifting in perception of healthcare in a rapidly changing world, the fact that more than 90% of the resources for healing ministries was devoted to curative medicine was being questioned.

4. The Tübingen I and II Consultations co-organized by the World Council of Churches (WCC), the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) and the German Institute for Medical Mission (DIFÄM), in 1964 and 1968 addressed many of questions. These processes called for an integrated witness where medical work would be intentionally linked with social work, nutrition, and agricultural and community development. The participants recognized that medical care was only one component of a diversity of disciplines, all of which were necessary to promote and maintain health. This led to the formation of the Christian Medical Commission (CMC) in 1968. The CMC assisted in the reorientation of the churches' health care so that it would evolve into a more comprehensive and community-oriented service. With CMC's close working relationship with the World Health Organization (WHO) in Geneva, grass-roots experience on issues of community health were channeled to the international, intergovernmental body. The churches were able to influence and provide quality experiential and experimental input into a joint study process called "Alternative approaches to meeting basic health needs of populations in developing countries" and carried out by WHO and UNICEF. The process of demystifying health care, where services are tailored to the needs of the communities with the local population being involved in the formulation of the policy and delivery of the system, led to the development of primary health care.

Christian imperative

5. Public health is the science and art of promoting health, preventing disease and prolonging life through organized efforts of society. Christians have played a key role in the evolution of public health from ancient to modern times. The understanding that humankind was created in the image of God and that all are equally precious to God, has contributed to providing health care to all equally (Genesis 1:27). This perspective has been further strengthened by the biblical imperative to relate to and make a difference in the lives of vulnerable persons and communities (Matthew 25:40). This approach was evident in the life of Jesus, his disciples and the saints throughout the centuries. Throughout history Christians have followed Jesus' teachings by serving whole communities during epidemics and health crises. This continues today. Ministries of health care are possible both through its setting up intentional church infrastructure, but also through development and training of health professionals.

Continuing challenges

6. The dream of the Alma Ata conference, 'Health for All by the Year 2000' could not be achieved. The health status of the people in developing countries has not improved and in many cases it has deteriorated further. Currently, we face a global health crisis, characterized by growing inequalities within and between countries. New threats to health continue to emerge and these are compounded by negative forces of globalization which prevent the equitable distribution of resources needed to ensure health for all, and in particular for the poor. Within the health sector itself, failure to implement the principles of primary health care as set out in the Alma-Ata declaration, has significantly aggravated the global health crisis.

7. In these situations the churches, present throughout the developing world, continue their focus on providing health care and services to remote, vulnerable or impoverished communities and empowering them to take care of their own health. In addition, faith-based organizations are major health providers in most developing countries, e.g. providing about 40% of services in sub-Saharan Africa. Despite being closely aligned with community needs, faith-based organizations often go unrecognized because they usually operate outside official government processes. Evidence suggests that a range of treatment, care and prevention activities in accordance with primary health care principles is provided by faith-based organizations.
8. With attention to accountability and monitoring, governments can work with these organizations on the basis that such partnerships will deliver public value and narrow gaps in national health planning systems. At the same time, governments must be challenged to develop programs to meet the need of health care for all as a human right. The UN International Covenant on Economic, Social & Cultural Rights states in Article 12 that, “The States Parties to the present Covenant recognize the right of everyone to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health...” Article 25 of the UN Declaration of Human Rights states, “Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and of his family, including food, clothing, housing and medical care and necessary social services, and the right to security in the event of unemployment, sickness, disability, widowhood, old age or other lack of livelihood in circumstances beyond his control.” The Center for Economic and Social Rights describes the right to health to include the basic requirements of availability, accessibility, acceptability, and quality.

Recommendations

While strongly affirming the work the churches do in primary health care, the executive committee hopes that this minute will re-energize churches in recommitting themselves to achieving health for all. The executive committee of the World Council of Churches meeting in Lübeck, Germany, from 23-26 September 2008:

- A. **Acknowledges** the role of church-related health services, their community-based initiatives and grassroots movements, e.g., people’s health movements, to sustain and strengthen the primary health care approach;
- B. **Affirms** with appreciation the leadership of the World Health Organization and inspired governmental and intergovernmental bodies in reinvigorating the primary health care by placing it in the broader agenda of equity and human development by linking its renewal with efforts to strengthen health systems, promoting sustainable improvements in community participation and collaboration among different sectors of society;
- C. **Encourages** the leadership of the churches to exercise their role as advocates so that each congregation can become part of the healing community and promote equitable and just health policies with their civic leaders;

- D. *Encourages* the churches to reorient their medical services back to primary health care, by providing adequate training and human and material resources;
- E. *Encourages* the churches to forge partnerships with community-based, non-governmental and faith-based organizations providing health services and local government to fortify, sustain and enhance the primary health care system at the district and community level.
- F. *Urges* individuals and churches to advocate for better health care provisions from their governments within their own state and community and to promote health care as a human right.

- **Statement presented at the World Health Organization’s high-level consultation on the financial crisis and global health, 19 January 2009**

Financial crisis and global health

Friends, we are deeply appreciative of Director-General Dr Chan’s leadership in calling this critical consultation. We thank you for this opportunity to express some civil society perspectives on the topic and to participate in the ongoing discussions.

The lasting lesson that the global financial crisis will bring to society is the increasing realization of what is of enduring value and the greatest asset that we possess: OUR PEOPLE! How economies would fare after the crisis has long past will depend very much on how governments and society as a whole are able to care for the welfare and health of their people during the crisis. Our people are best served when we work together – governments and civil society; from the international, regional, national to the local contexts.

A call to the international community

Today the fabric of human society is stretched thin. A third of the population of sub-Saharan Africa, and more than 20% of the population in South Asia have been going hungry, even before the financial crisis dawned on us. There is absolutely no room for cutbacks on social expenditure. The global financial crisis in the early 1980s and the disastrous consequences of the supposedly correctional measures on the health and welfare of society have made all of us wiser, I believe.

We do not live in isolated communities, but are part of a global village, each one of us a part of one humanity, dependent on one another for our well-being. Currently many of the key campaigns to combat diseases and to keep the global public health objectives on track to achieve the Millennium Development Goals are heavily dependent on international cooperation and support. Cutting back on funding will jeopardize ongoing treatment of millions of people affected by diseases such as HIV and tuberculosis. This is

not only an infringement of the fundamental rights of these individuals, but it will also potentially open up a Pandora's box of public health disasters. Erratic and incomplete treatments compound the danger of the development of myriad multidrug-resistant strains of pathogenic organisms.

Though societies in wealthier countries have been hard hit by this financial crisis, the world cannot afford a reduction in their current commitments. We are heartened to hear the reaffirmations of the promises of many partners and we look forward to the realizations of these commitments.

A call to governments

The full impact of the crisis is not yet upon us. Past financial crises, the global financial crisis in the early 1980s, the Asian crisis in the 1990s and the Latin American crisis in 2000 have clearly shown us the critical role played by civil society in the recovery of societies. Though these contributions are invaluable, they are not necessarily reflected in the budget lines of governmental health expenditures.

As private out-of-pocket expenditures tends to decline in a recession, societal dependence on private health care declines and is replaced by services that are available at lower cost in the public sector. This is recognized. But what is not always obvious is that, in times of crisis, a significant additional burden is taken on by service providers in the nongovernmental and private not-for-profit sectors, including faith-based organizations, cooperatives and movements such as the Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, along with the health providers in the government.

Although it is too early to tell, initial reports from several countries indicate reductions in staff and other cost-saving measures by a number of nongovernmental organizations, while demand for services has increased significantly. In some countries, government subsidies to the private not-for-profit sector (including faith-based organizations providing health services) have been diminishing, a pattern that can be further exacerbated given pressures on public sector budgets, in the context of increasing demands.

When crisis stares at communities, civil society is by their side. The cooperatives, the community centres, the mosques, temples and churches do not disappear. They remain, helping communities to cope. There are clear limitations and governments will have to identify with their primary responsibility of making public health a reality. We cannot manage alone; rather we will work shoulder to shoulder with the governments to serve people best. Governments need to recognize the assets and services that civil society provide and see them as part of their national strategy; engage them; assist and resource them; and hold them accountable.

The key role of stimulus packages as a tool to put the economies back on the track to progress has been recognized. But it is important the application of this tool goes beyond infrastructure development. In an environment when people are losing jobs and there are real reductions in wages, these stimulus packages should aim at directly filling the wage

gap, taking care so that the most vulnerable in the community can benefit from them. The choice for a mother between spending her last dollar for transportation to collect the monthly medicines and feeding her starving children is no choice at all. Strengthening the public distribution system for food; provision of free or supported transportation to health-care centres; providing support for treatments; removal of user fees – these are examples of direct action which could close the wage gap.

There is ample evidence to show that the proactive policies taken by governments and the critical investments in periods of crisis drew rich dividends for communities. Hence the policies you help formulate now will have profound impacts on societies for years to come.

How are the most vulnerable faring?

The highest reaches of public health and well-being that societies can achieve are based on the firm foundation that the most vulnerable person in each society has access to dignity, respect, love and wholehearted service. In the midst of crisis there can be a tendency to neglect the most vulnerable – people in remote regions; internally displaced people who are not included in official records; communities suffering from ongoing conflicts that we avoid addressing. The welfare of the most vulnerable defies the law of averages and cannot be drowned by numbers. It stands as a poignant indicator of the level of commitment of our societies to justice and equity.

The security of humanitarian and health workers

The most innovative of schemes in the direst of times will succeed only if the workers facilitating it out in the community are valued, affirmed and safe. The promotion of sustainable peace in conflict ridden regions is fundamental and not a luxury, if a healthy society has to be rebuilt.

The level of violence that humanitarian and health workers face is largely invisible to the world. In the year 2008, world-wide, 34 United Nations staff were killed as a result of violence. But this number does not take into account the local staffs that have lost their lives. In Somalia alone, 40 humanitarian workers lost their lives last year, the majority of whom were local staffs. The loss of life is but the tip of the iceberg of molestations, harassments, injury and extreme hardships that health and humanitarian workers face. The investments required for a motivated and secure health-worker force should never be underestimated even in the toughest of times.

Hard questions to be answered

While we challenge governments and the international community, we from the civil society working on health issues have to examine ourselves in a forthright and frank manner. As our communities face this global financial crisis, are we working together with the wider civil society? Are we working closely with the governments? Are we aware of the assets that we have and we have influence over? Are we offering these – our institutional, personnel and financial assets – to the service of society in a non-partisan manner?

These questions have to be answered with honesty at all levels and we need to recommit ourselves to address this crisis.

Align assets and act with urgency and synergy

Our people are the greatest asset that society possesses. Ensuring their health and welfare even in the most difficult times takes precedent over other priorities. To achieve this we will have to work together, governments and civil society, from the international, regional, national to the local contexts. Let us be aware of the risks that we face today; let us appreciate the assets that we all possess; let us align the assets that we have influence over, and act in a sustained and synergistic manner, as a matter of urgency.

• Call to the WHO, member states, social movements and civil society organizations at the 62nd World Health Assembly, 15–16 May 2009

Civil society organizations and social movements from across the globe met in Geneva, on 15-16 May, 2009, at a Forum on Equity, Justice and Health, organized by Peoples Health Movement, Third World Network, and the World Council of Churches to share concerns and recommend actions that civil society views as being of critical importance for advances in global Health and health equity. Based on the discussions we present to the WHO and member countries participating in the 62nd World Health Assembly some overarching concerns as well as specific recommendations on the two resolutions on Primary Health Care and Social Determinants of Health. We urge member countries, civil society organizations and the WHO to take these into account in deliberations in the Assembly incorporate these in the resolutions to be discussed.

We urge member states

In the area of Primary Health Care and Social Determinants to:

- ***privilege*** the interests of people and public health, over commercial and corporate interests.
- ***adopt*** a rights-based approach, including full ratification of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights
- ***establish*** a time-frame for achieving health for all, incorporating different strategies in local contexts
- ***recognize*** the central role and responsibility of governments in ensuring universal access to health, while acknowledging the current role of community and faith-based organizations in PHC
- ***recognize*** the capacities and capabilities of grassroots and community organizations and indigenous groups, as building blocks in the design and implementation of PHC
- ***ensure*** that gender equity is a cross cutting concern in the implementation of PHC and in the addressing of social determinants of health

- **increase** capacities of the public sector in health care provision, health research and health related industry (viz. pharmaceutical manufacturing), and strengthen national public health programmes.

More specifically in the areas of

1. Governance, to:

- **ensure** democratic and transparent decision-making processes;
- **establish** mechanisms for accountability, including channels for civil society to monitor health budgets;
- **enable** empowerment of local populations to participate in the building of health care structures that are accountable to the needs of communities.

2. Health Financing, to:

- **dedicate** at least 5% of national income and 15% of national budgets to health services;
- **ensure** health care is free at the point of access for all, with a focus on equitable access for the poor;
- **establish** time-bound targets to achieve universal access that is free and equitable and ensure adequate resources to achieve them through sustainable financing mechanisms;
- **avoid** commercialization of health care and IP protection for health products, that unnecessarily increase the cost of health services without off-setting public health benefits.

3. Trade and Health, to:

- **in the interim, incorporate** full TRIPS flexibilities and avoid TRIPS-plus measures in national laws and in trade agreements, while working towards the re-negotiation of the TRIPS agreement to limit monopoly and promote access;
- **ensure** just/equitable licensing of IP produced by public funded research, and examine alternative mechanisms to IP to promote innovations;
- **promote** local manufacturing capacity for medicines, and strengthen public health systems' ability to promote medicines access through use of price controls, rational drug use and use of generics;
- **avoid** liberalization, of health services, and promotion of medical tourism at the cost of public health;
- **mainstream** health concerns in all trade negotiations, and ensure trade agreements do not impinge on domestic regulation, and involve Health Ministries actively in trade negotiations.

4. Food and Agriculture to:

- **promote and protect** land, water, forest and employment rights of agricultural workers;
- **restrict** use of agricultural land for non-food purposes (viz. for biofuels, SEZs);
- **support** local and traditional food and agricultural production;

- **ensure** equity in food distribution, promote food security, and ensure food safety norms that are also sensitive towards protection of livelihoods.

5. In the area of Human Resources to:

- **develop and implement** long-term human resource plans to meet health needs while also ensuring decent pay and working conditions of health care workers;
- **involve** health care workers, centrally, in health system planning processes;
- **put in place** policies and mechanisms to stop the flow of scarce health care workers away from developing countries, compensate governments for human resource losses and ensure ethical and transparent procedures where recruitment of external health care workers is unavoidable;
- **adopt** measures to retain, train/retrain and redeploy health professionals, and develop mechanisms for bringing unemployed HCW back into the HC system;
- **address** the problem of movement of the workers from the public to the private sector;
- **dedicate** long-term assistance for strengthening Human Resources in developing countries.

We urge the World Health Organization to:

- **reclaim** its leadership role in promoting and protecting of global health;
- **move beyond** operating in silos, and approach issues through the lens of equity, determinants and rights;
- **ensure** that priorities and actions of the WHO recognize that health inequities are tied to global structural inequities, and that addressing these inequities will require reorienting the global economic and political architecture;
- **mobilize** resources for resource deficient countries to implement PHC approaches and actions to address social determinants of health;
- **support** member states to enact legislations and mechanisms to make health a fundamental right.

More specifically in the areas of:

Human resources, to:

- **Give priority to** addressing the acute shortage of human resources for health care in developing countries as a cross cutting issue for the WHO;
- **Recognize** the urgency in this regard given the threat of reduction in jobs for health care workers in the context of the present global financial crisis.

Trade and Health, to:

- **build** internal technical capacity to monitor and assess impact of global economic and trade policies on health equity;
- **provide** technical assistance to member states to make use of TRIPS flexibilities, and to examine all trade agreements – multilateral or bilateral – with a public health lens;
- **be proactive in** preventing TRIPS “plus” measures from being promoted;
- **ensure** the exclusion of pharmaceutical companies in all forms of participation, including covert or overt funding, in norm setting activities;

- ***take the lead*** in moving health services out of the General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS).

Food and Agriculture, to:

- ***promote*** food security, and sustainable agricultural practices sensitive to local cultures and needs;
- ***coordinate*** monitoring and measurement of impacts of current financial, food, and agrarian crises on human nutrition.

We also urge member nations, in order to promote and protect global health equity, to ensure the following:

- Multilateral organizations, particularly the World Bank, the IMF and the WTO, should not act as spokesperson for global corporations.
- The governance of the IMF and the WB be democratized through representative voting mechanisms, with much greater levels of transparency and accountability.
- Multilateral agencies co-ordinate their activities to protect and promote biodiversity, and address the issue of climate change and its impact on health and health equity
- Address the inherent inequity in the Agreement on Agriculture under the WTO, so as to mitigate and reverse its devastating impact on land rights and access to local resources, local agricultural practices and food security in many developing countries
- WTO address need to protect agriculture from monopolies being conferred to agribusiness companies by IP protection.
- That they apply health equity impact assessment for all national and global policies
- In recognition of obligations of mutual assistance, establish mandatory mechanisms for global financing of national health systems in developing countries.

HUMAN RIGHTS

- **WCC international consultation on “Towards protection of human rights and human dignity amidst conflicts”, Geneva, Switzerland, 5-7 December 2007**

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights' 60th anniversary makes 2008 an opportunity for passionate church advocacy

As 2008 marks the 60th anniversary of the UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights, it will be a "fantastic opportunity" for churches to re-connect with the endeavour of protecting and promoting human dignity, participants at an international ecumenical consultation were told.

"Next year will be a 'kairos' – an appropriate time – for the ecumenical movement to re-connect with the cause of human rights. Churches can make of the 60th anniversary of the Universal Declaration an opportunity for human rights evangelism, as if were", said Peter Prove, assistant to the general secretary for International Affairs and Human Rights at the Lutheran World Federation.

According to Prove, churches have moral authority, broad reach, capacity for education and ability to build bridges with other faiths and civil society. All that puts them in a unique position to make an impact on international mechanisms for the protection of human rights.

Prove was speaking at a panel on "ecumenical strategy" during the 5-7 December international consultation "Towards protection of human rights and human dignity amidst conflicts". Called by the World Council of Churches, the consultation gathered in Geneva some 40 participants: church leaders, human rights advocates, social and political activists, policy-makers and human rights experts from Asia, Africa, the Caribbean, Latin America, Middle East, North America and the Pacific.

Also speaking at the "ecumenical strategy panel", the Rev. Dr Jochen Motte, from the United Evangelical Mission (Germany), proposed a number of recommendations for ecumenical human rights advocacy. Amongst them, the need for ecumenical organizations to give relevant input to the UN Human Rights Council also on those cases when "churches on the ground are not in a position to do it by themselves" was affirmed.

The role of linking UN human rights agencies with human rights defenders and victims of human rights violations was also stressed. Facilitating the presence of the latter at sessions of Geneva-based UN human rights bodies has been one of the features of the ecumenical role in this field that must continue, Motte said.

- **Statement on democratic electoral processes, adopted by WCC central committee, Geneva, Switzerland, 13–20 February 2008**

*“The earth is the Lord’s and all that is in it; the world, and those who live in it”
(Psalm 24:1)*

*“Choose for each of your tribes individuals who are wise, discerning and reputable
to be your leaders”
(Deuteronomy 1:13)*

1. Although the Bible offers no description of the definitive political system, it indicates that every system has both the potential for participation, and for the abuse of power. For Christians, the Hebrew prophetic traditions – as well as the Christian tradition – offer the reminder that people of faith must embrace the responsibility to be engaged in the civil political systems of which they are a part, but that they must also embrace the responsibility to advocate for justice, compassion and morality when those in authority abuse their power.
2. Christians faithfully function within many different political systems and are often called upon to play influential roles within those systems. In so doing, they fulfil their calling to be salt and light which both seasons and enlightens any system in which they have been placed.
3. One of the most significant developments in recent history is the increased use of democratic electoral processes. The United Nations’ “Millennium Declaration” commits the nations of the world “to promote democracy and strengthen the rule of law, as well as respect for all internationally recognized human rights and fundamental freedoms”. In it, world leaders commit “to work collectively for more inclusive political processes, allowing genuine participation by all citizens”. Upon the occasion of the 60th Anniversary of the UN “Universal Declaration of Human Rights”, adopted on 10 December 1948, it is important to recall this text in light of recent electoral processes in Kenya, Georgia, the Ukraine and Pakistan; and in anticipation of elections in Zimbabwe, Angola, Russia, Armenia, Italy, the United States and Fiji.
4. A critical look at electoral processes as a part of democratic governance is needed in order to safeguard a just, participatory and moral framework for the exercise of power in democratic systems. Though democracy has led to a greater degree of liberty and participation for individuals in their political systems, in some cases it has been misused in such a way that it has negated the rule of law, exacerbated corruption, and offered a political legitimization for the abuse of human rights. In addition, there is a growing tendency for certain economic, bureaucratic and media elites to exercise significant power without sufficient accountability to democratically elected authorities. It is the responsibility of the church to call attention to these abuses of power.

5. In democratic systems, elections serve as a way for people to confer legitimacy on a participatory democratic political system. In order to ensure that an election truly reflects the will of the people, attention should be paid to pre- and post- electoral mechanisms. Electoral monitoring on election days does not suffice. A number of recent situations reveal that serious compromises to electoral outcomes can occur, both during the preparation period preceding the elections and after the elections (for example, in cases where there is a dispute over the result and a recount). In addition, dubious election laws, limitations to the full participation of minority and economically disadvantaged candidates and parties, manipulation of voter registration processes and voting machines, biased media coverage of candidates, and manipulation on the part of opposition parties can affect outcomes. Effective monitoring of electoral processes should seek to analyze these factors, and to address any perceived manipulations in order to ensure the legitimacy of democratically elected governments.
6. In spite of these safeguards, it must be acknowledged that a democratically elected government does not guarantee the fulfilment of citizens' aspirations. Democracy cannot flourish in a context of fear, nor in a situation lacking the institutions necessary for sustaining a democratically elected government.²⁶ Effective public institutions, including an independent judiciary, an impartial police force, an accountable legislature, a responsible and effective public service, and a process for democratic evaluation and reform are necessary. The obligations of the international community are not limited to electoral monitoring, but rather to the encouragement of all of the necessary frameworks for the establishment of a truly participatory democracy.
7. Democratic assessments offer an important tool for the identification of democratic deficits. They can also provide valuable information, which can enable civil society to engage in public debate about the objectives of democratization and the needed reforms in any democratic system. Such assessments can help to establish and sustain accountable, effective and participatory democratic governments, which minimize potential abuses of power.
8. In addition, it must be acknowledged that – as in every political system – poverty and exclusion pose a major threat to full participation in the political life of a community, and to the proper functioning of society.
9. In recognition of the importance of legitimate electoral processes and democratic frameworks, the World Council of Churches, through its ecumenical electoral monitoring teams, has accompanied churches in several countries to ensure fairness and justice in electoral processes.

²⁶ See the central committee background document *Contemporary Challenges to Africa*, January 1994, which stated, "elections alone do not constitute democracy.... True participatory democracy... requires fundamental institutional change, authentic respect for individual and collective rights and freedoms, including economic rights".

10. In all regions of the world we have seen evidence of the abuse of power, electoral irregularities, and examples of corruption, intimidation and electoral fraud. We believe that, in situations where people and societies have established democratic systems, that their governments should be based on the collaboration and participation of all citizens – regardless of race, ethnic background, economic status, different abilities, gender or religion.

Therefore, the central committee of the World Council of Churches, meeting in Geneva, Switzerland, 13-20 February 2008:

- A. *Urges* all countries to protect human rights and fundamental freedoms through the establishment of independent judiciaries, impartial police forces, accountable legislatures, and responsible public services;
- B. *Encourages* democratic countries to constantly monitor the electoral processes through which people can freely and fairly express their political will, and to establish necessary processes for democratic evaluation and reform;
- C. *Commends* the work of the UN and non-governmental institutions in various countries, that have provided electoral assistance and assessment, including voter education programmes, technical assistance and information concerning the conduct of elections, electoral monitoring and observation;
- D. *Requests* the UN and other regional and international institutions to continue to provide all necessary assistance in order to ensure the realization of just and participatory elections in democratically established states;
- E. *Appeals* to churches to be actively involved, where appropriate, in civil political engagement and education through awareness-building programmes for voters, and to participate in the monitoring and assessment of electoral processes in order to ensure fair, just and participatory democratic elections.

- **Tribute to the life and work of Clement John, programme executive for Human Rights at the WCC, 2 June 2008**

Clement John, a respected colleague in the work of the World Council of Churches and an outstanding advocate in the international struggle for human rights, passed away unexpectedly on Monday 2 June 2008 at his home in the US state of Minnesota. His sudden absence leaves us in shock, for his activism and vision had been so much a part of our lives. Clement informed us less than a week ago that he had accepted the post of associate director of the Christian Study Centre in Rawalpindi, Pakistan and that he planned to return to his native country this summer. He had recently been working on a new book with the working title Religion, State and Intolerance, in which he addressed

recent controversies over laws on blasphemy and religious practice in Pakistan and throughout the world.

Clement John was an accomplished lawyer, yet his career came to be shaped by his dedication to the Church of Pakistan and the ecumenical movement toward Christian unity. As a young man, Clement was politically active in the National Student Federation, the Young Lawyer's Association and the Pakistan People's Party even as he served on the board of directors of the YMCA of Karachi and became a founding member of the joint committee for justice and peace of the Karachi dioceses of the Church of Pakistan and the Roman Catholic Church. In 1983, he left a prestigious partnership in a Pakistani law firm for a post in Hong Kong as executive secretary for international affairs of the Christian Conference of Asia (CCA). In that role, he became an organizer and the first general secretary of both the Asian Human Rights Commission and the Asian Legal Resource Centre.

In 1993, Clement joined the staff of the international affairs department of the World Council of Churches (WCC) in Geneva. He specialized in the areas of human rights and the Asia-Pacific region, but his intellect and profound concern are reflected in almost every aspect of the public witness of the WCC. By the time of his official retirement from the WCC in 2006, he was serving as director of the Commission of the Churches on International Affairs.

Clement was an ecumenical pioneer. He organized fact-finding missions and pastoral visits to such regions as Sri Lanka, the Philippines, East Timor, Sudan, Nigeria and China. While in Hong Kong with the CCA, he helped create the South-South Exchange programme among churches of the southern hemisphere and the rest of the developing world. He helped design the contemporary strategies for advocacy by which churches bear witness before the UN human rights commission and other international agencies. He took particular pride in his support of the Dalit minority and its right to organize and give testimony in international settings. Clement John was never reluctant to speak the truth, even in the presence of worldly powers, even at the risk of being criticized for appearing "too political". He stood firm for justice and strove for peace.

Our prayers and our thoughts are with Clement's wife, Violet, with their children, with their extended family and innumerable friends. May we all find comfort and hope in the good news of the resurrection to eternal life, in God's great love for Clement and for all of us. And, at this stage of our lives, may the shining example of Clement's principled courage inspire us to continue his work.

Rev. Dr Samuel Kobia
General secretary
World Council of Churches

- **Statement on the 60th anniversary of the UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights, adopted by WCC executive committee, Lübeck, Germany, 23–26 September 2008**

“The spirit of the sovereign Lord is on me, because the Lord has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to bind up the broken-hearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives and release from darkness for the prisoners.” (Isaiah 61:1)

1. December 10, 2008 marks the 60th anniversary of the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR). The UDHR is the foundation of the modern human rights system, the first universal statement on the basic principles of inalienable human rights, and a common standard of achievement for all peoples and all nations. In the words of Eleanor Roosevelt it is *“the international Magna Carta for all mankind (humankind).”*
2. The World Council of Churches, through its Commission of the Churches on International Affairs, participated in the drafting of the United Nations Declaration on Human Rights, and contributed the text in Article 18 on freedom of thought, conscience, and religion. The WCC has since been active in promoting the declaration’s implementation.
3. Considerable progress has been made in the advancement and reinforcement of the human rights protection mechanisms over the last years. The establishment of the Human Rights Council and of the Universal Periodic Review mechanism could be listed among the efforts to strengthen the United Nations human rights machinery in a more democratic and transparent way. Some important human rights instruments like the Convention on the Rights of Peoples with Disabilities, the International Convention on Enforced Disappearance and the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, have also been adopted. Furthermore, a draft Optional Protocol to the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural rights which aims at establishing an individual complaint mechanism under the covenant will hopefully be adopted in the near future.
4. The prosecution of genocide, crimes against humanity and war crimes by the international tribunals and national courts has also been a positive step in the fight against impunity for grave human rights violations. Another recent development worth mentioning is the moratorium on the death penalty, adopted by the general assembly of the United Nations in late 2007.
5. These are undoubtedly very positive developments. However today, six decades after the adoption of the UDHR, human rights are continually violated or misused in pursuit of particular national, ethnic, racial, religious and ideological interests and the levels of impunity, injustice and inequality are overwhelming.

6. Millions of people are still witnessing a flagrant violation of their fundamental human rights in many countries around the world. Extensive use of torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment, lack of protection for refugees and internally displaced persons, discriminatory policies against migrants, increasing violence against women and children, attacks against human rights activists, attacks of civilians by armed groups and government forces, denial of economic and social rights like right to food, access to medical care and education, alarming increase of the people living in conditions of extreme poverty, are only some of the many human rights violations witnessed over the past year.
7. Furthermore, people are murdered, arrested or discriminated against for their religious beliefs. Religious minorities, women, refugees and detainees are in a particularly vulnerable situation with regard to their freedom of religion or belief. Many governments encroach on the freedom of worship and numerous places of worship are attacked by non-State actors.
8. It is evident that there is still a huge gap between words and deeds, promises and action. Certainly much has been achieved on a normative level especially in the area of standard setting and monitoring. Nonetheless, adopting and ratifying inter-governmental human rights instruments, although very important, it simply does not suffice. There is a need to respect and to promote by all means both in law and in practice the full realization of the rights included in these agreements in every country around the world. Governments must defend the rights of the people that are under their jurisdiction and must show their political will to seriously tackle with the grave human rights violations that occur in various parts of the world.
9. As was stated during the 5th WCC Assembly in Nairobi, 1975: *“Our concern for human rights is based on our conviction that God wills a society in which all can exercise full human rights. All human beings are created in the image of God, equal and infinitely precious in God’s sight and ours. Jesus Christ has bound us to one another by his life, death and resurrection, so that what concerns one concerns us all.”*

Fully aware of the interconnection and interdependence of human rights and human dignity, the executive committee of the World Council of Churches, meeting in Lübeck, Germany, 23-26 September 2008:

- A. **reaffirms** its commitment to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and to the principles enshrined within it;
- B. **regrets** the huge gap which continues to exist between declarations on human rights and implementation, and the tragic human suffering this represents as a result of extensive violation of human rights;
- C. **requests** governments to adopt, ratify and respect international and regional instruments for the promotion and protection of human rights, to monitor compliance

with them in their own countries and around the world, and to underwrite that commitment with human and financial resources;

- D. ***urges*** governments to take all necessary measures in order to guarantee the effective protection and promotion of the right to freedom of religion or belief and to challenge intolerance or discrimination based on religion or belief in society;
- E. ***calls*** on churches, through education and action, to work to promote human dignity by improving public understanding of human rights violations and of the human rights protection mechanisms and urges member churches and their governments to cooperate with the UN and other governments and non-governmental bodies in this regard;
- F. ***commends*** the ongoing work of the churches and ecumenical organizations for the promotion and protection of human rights and urges them to continue to stress the linkages between universally accepted standards of human rights and the Christian commitment to human dignity;
- G. ***acknowledges*** human rights advocacy work to be an essential and integral component of the worldwide struggle and yearning for peace with justice and an important part of the ministry of the church;

INTERRELIGIOUS RELATIONS AND DIALOGUE

- **“How can religions live together?” Keynote lecture by WCC general secretary at 31st German Kirchentag, 7 June 2007**

Dear friends,

What a joy to be with you and so many German Christians again at this 31st German Kirchentag in Cologne! The Cathedral on the other side of the Rhine reminds us of the many centuries of Christian presence in this country. The faces of the many young people here at the Kirchentag signify that there is life and future for the churches in Germany. May God bless you all and be among us this morning!

“Religions living together” is the theme for our deliberations this morning. Living together, however, is about people and is not just an abstract concept stemming from the different religions – as if books about Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism or other religions could talk with each other from their library shelves. The question is rather:

- How do people of different faiths live together as neighbours and not as enemies?
or
- How do we share our common home, this planet, as people of different faiths?

In the aftermath of September 11, 2001, the global media has emphasized the tensions between the “Western” and the “Muslim” world. Samuel Huntington’s theory of the “clash of civilizations” has become the framework for seeing and interpreting the current situation¹. These perceptions are further fuelled by almost daily news on violence in the Middle East and in other places around the world.

But there is also the other side of the story. There are communities in Indonesia rediscovering their ancient ways of peacemaking in situations of conflict. There are intense efforts to work for peace and reconciliation between communities in northern Nigeria, in Lebanon and in so many other countries. There are also the many, many families – even here in Germany – which include members of different faith communities who live in peace and harmony with each other. Multifaith households and extended families are becoming an increasing social phenomenon in many parts of the world.

This is in brief what I would like to talk about. I will do this in three steps:

1. I will share with you a story from the life-experience of such “interreligious families”.
2. I will then concentrate on reflections on the role of religion in violent conflicts and what we can learn from research done on this, and
3. I will conclude with some examples from the work of the World Council of Churches (WCC) and its member churches how we complement interreligious dialogue with interreligious co-operation.

Living together as people from different faith communities

When I started talking to some of my colleagues in the WCC, I was surprised how many of them actually count people from other faith communities to their family members. My assistant, a Christian from the USA, is married to a Muslim from Egypt. They are now a wonderful family with two children who learn Arabic at the Geneva Mosque and also participate in the worship of the English-speaking Lutheran congregation in Geneva. While the rest of the family displayed some hesitation in the beginning, this has changed in the meantime.

There are colleagues from India with Hindu brothers-in-law, those from Sweden with Jewish family background, those from Germany with a cousin who is living here in Cologne as the wife of a young Turkish Muslim.

I could go on with these examples from the staff community in the WCC. I am sure that some of you also share similar experiences. But for those among us who do not have people from other faith communities in their families, let me briefly speak about my own family in Kenya. It has now been several years since my niece married a Muslim from Uganda. It was natural to all of us that he would be with us when we celebrate Christmas, as he would invite us to celebrate together the *Eid al-Fitr* at the end of Ramadan. These are the moments when we talk about our faith journeys and grow in understanding of each other.

I have come to believe that there is a distinctive African way of being Christian or being Muslim. It is rooted in our African understanding of the *ubuntu*, of life in community, and of God as the supreme power and origin of all life. It is very strange for us to think that God would want us to fight for him. God the almighty does not need us to come to his defense. We depend on God and not God on us. The very fact that we believe in God should unite and not separate us across religious boundaries.

A colleague from Tanzania told me the story of a German missionary from the Berlin Mission. When the Germans occupied the region of the Kilimanjaro Mountain, this missionary destroyed the trees of the ancient African shrine and built a church at the same place. When they started to cut the trees, an old man stood in their way, asking them: “what kind of God is this who wants you to destroy the holy places of others?”

It is one of the sad chapters of Christian mission history that in the name of Christ the presence of other religions was oppressed in often-violent ways. Just as the memory of the crusades is not forgotten in the Middle East so the oppressive side of Christian mission in other regions. If we do not own up to this history, turn around and repent, this part of our past will always haunt the relationships among us and with people of other faiths.

Living together as people from different faith communities requires that all of us overcome histories of domination and oppression and learn to live as neighbours and friends who share our lives in a common home – planet earth. Only then we will become one human family, which, I believe, God wants us to be.

Overcoming violent conflict

If this is our goal, we will be aware of the many traps and obstacles that can derail us and block our common journey. To affirm justice and to honour the dignity of the other will always be the basic and guiding principles on our way. It is only destructive to undermine others' life and survival or to humiliate them. It can happen so easily – even through simple caricatures or jokes about the other – there are so many jokes about the Rabbi, the Priest and the Imam going to heaven or meeting someone; about the Pope or a Protestant pastor that might look innocent and rather innocent to us, but such a joke might hurt the other very, very deeply.

Since religion is at the centre of life for many people all over the earth, religion is a very sensitive issue when it comes to tensions and conflict. Historians have noted that more than three quarters of the world's civil conflicts in the period from 1960 to 1990 can be traced to ethno-religious causes. This proportion further increased with the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991.² Whether we like it or not, religion plays a critical role in the present context.

Contrary to expectations that, step by step, western culture would replace local cultural environments and marginalize the role of religion, religion is reasserting itself in the public realm. Twenty years ago, social scientists and other researchers expected secularism to spread. Today, they are giving the role of religion more and more attention. But this re-discovery of religion is often accompanied by accusations that religion is the source of evils such as dogmatism, fanaticism, extremism, etc.

I am convinced that this tendency still reflects the underlying assumptions of the secularization theory. It derives from the massive conflict in European culture that culminated in the Thirty Years War in the seventeenth century. To neutralise the effect of devastating religious conflict at the political level was of vital importance for the stabilization of nation states and the future of Europe. Today, the re-appearance of religion in the public sphere, therefore, is often perceived as alarming, providing a rationale for all kinds of fears and new enemy images. This was apparent even during the first Gulf War.

Attributing outbursts of violence only to religion even where religious symbols accentuate tensions or where religion explains differences among groups of people in a conflict, is not correct. Causes for violent conflicts are usually more complex. They are the result of the inter-action of many global, national and local factors.³ What is called the "resurgence of religion" with reference to new forms of religious fundamentalism is probably most adequately interpreted as a form of collective resistance against cultural hegemony in the context of globalization. It corresponds to the need of different communities of people to find their place and be recognized in the brutally competitive environment shaped by global economic and political forces.

Studying the brutal conflict between Hindus and Muslims in India, the Indian psychoanalyst, Sudhir Kakar, came to the following conclusion: “What we are witnessing today is less the resurgence of religion than of communalism where a community of believers not only has religious affiliation but also social, economic, and political interests in common which may conflict with the corresponding interests of another community of believers who share the same geographical space”.⁴

Sudhir Kakar’s analysis of the conflict between Hindus and Muslims in India suggests that social, economic, political and cultural consequences of the accelerated process of globalization significantly contribute to the emergence of new ethno-religious conflicts. Globalization has social and ecological costs that have become much clearer in recent years, e.g. a growing gap between rich and poor and an increasing number of “disposable” and excluded people corresponds to accelerated extraction of resources, high levels of energy consumption and destruction of spaces and species essential for future survival. These costs as a result of globalization contribute to emerging conflicts by increasing pressure on local communities and creating new forms of insecurity.⁵

Sharing the same space, different groups find themselves more and more in competition for control over systemic power. Under the pressure of the social and ecological costs of globalization, everybody operates with the assumption that you lose out completely if you do not belong to those who have access to systemic power and global flows of capital, goods and information.

Under these circumstances, the politics of identity become the battlefield for social inclusion and exclusion, and the distribution of power.⁶ Strong symbols of belonging are mobilized and often re-invented, creating communities that can claim power and access to land and resources for themselves at the expense of others. Family relationships and ethnic identities are the first to be exploited together with different religious affiliations and other markers of difference, such as race and gender. For political leaders who have nothing to offer to the poor, mobilizing those strong symbols of belonging is a tempting way to create loyalty and influence the distribution of power in society in their own favour.

The WCC – interreligious dialogue and interreligious co-operation

It is obvious that religion can be both a source of division and hatred and a liberating force contributing to life in dignity in just and sustainable communities. Which side will surface depends on a number of internal and external factors to religion itself. Saying this, I simply want to describe a social reality. As a Christian theologian, however, I do not surrender to the given circumstances. I am involved in the conflict of interpretation for a meaningful role of Christian faith in today’s world in response to the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

The prophet Zephaniah reminded his people:

Seek the Lord, all you humble of the land, who do his commands; seek righteousness, seek humility. (Zephaniah 2:3)

We hear Jesus saying according to the Gospel of Matthew:
Strive first for the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. (Matthew 6:33)

This message of the Bible led me to say before:
To affirm justice and to honour the dignity of the other will always be the basic and guiding principles on our way.

Or in words more familiar to all of us:
Love your neighbour, as you love yourself.

In situations of conflict, this Gospel imperative compels us to work for healing and reconciliation among the different groups involved. This often requires healing of memories that are deeply hurt by the suffering and the enmity that have grown in the past and which the conflict has aggravated. Healing is only possible if atrocities and crimes committed in the past are acknowledged. But the process cannot just stay there. It must necessarily lead to restitution and in some cases to reparations in order to arrive at a situation where justice rules the relationships and all can live in dignity.

There are a number of good examples for such processes, not surprisingly with critical involvement by churches and church leaders. What we have learned together in intra-Christian processes of reconciliation – just think of the reconciliation process between Germans and people from Poland and the former Soviet Union; think of Northern Ireland or the Truth and Reconciliation Commission under the leadership of Archbishop Desmond Tutu in South Africa – what we have learned in intra-Christian processes of reconciliation can help us to develop similar approaches between people from different faith communities.

Against this background, the WCC has engaged in efforts to juxtapose interreligious dialogue with interreligious co-operation. Perhaps the best illustration for this new way of interreligious engagement is the life journey of our former colleague, Dr Tarek Mitri, who was responsible for Christian-Muslim dialogue. Dr Mitri currently holds a key position in the government of Lebanon. He went back to Beirut when the prime minister called him to intensify the process for reconciliation among the different groups in the Lebanese society. He moved from the ministry of the environment, to the ministry of culture and is now acting foreign minister of his country. He represented Lebanon at the UN General Assembly and the Security Council during last year's Israeli invasion of Lebanon and last week when the Security Council decided on investigation of the killing former Prime Minister Hariri.

Dr Mitri has taken a high personal risk to serve his country and to live his conviction that dialogue and co-operation between religions is necessary for peace and justice in this world.

At present we are very actively engaging Christian and Muslim leaders in the Horn of Africa. There is the danger that peace in the region and the fragile peace process in Sudan

will break apart in a series of regional wars. As a consequence of the situation in Somalia, which has become a battlefield of the “war on terror”, tensions between Christian and Muslim communities are growing. This is a very dangerous moment for the countries in the region – also my own, Kenya.

Let me conclude here. I think it is clear, we are

- Engaging in studies, for instance on the role of churches in situations of conflicts, or
- Holding conferences such as the “Critical Moment Conference” in 2005 that are landmark events for determining a new approach to interreligious co-operation, or
- Engaging in the Decade to Overcome Violence as a platform for the churches to learn from each other and support each other mutually.

All this we do. But even more important is our active work for peace and reconciliation, together with our member churches and ecumenical partners in the most critical and violent places of this world.

So much more can be said about this but I would also like us to have enough time for questions and some discussion. I am eager to hear from you on your concerns and questions. I hope that we can all learn from each other and be enriched by our encounter this morning.

Thank you very much for your attention.

- **Meeting of US Christian leaders with Iranian President Ahmadinejad, 27 September 2007**

In an effort to promote dialogue as an alternative to a possible military confrontation between Iran and the United States, the World Council of Churches (WCC) co-sponsored a discussion between Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad and nearly 140 people of faith from across the United States.

The 27 September meeting, which was held in the Tillman Inter-Faith Chapel of the Church Center at the United Nations in New York, was organized by the Mennonite central committee, a relief, development and peace agency of the North American Mennonites. It came one day after Ahmadinejad had addressed the UN assembly.

Rev. Christopher Ferguson, the WCC representative to the United Nations, served on the panel which posed a series of questions to Ahmadinejad including queries about his controversial remarks around the Holocaust, Iran’s nuclear development and human rights issues.

“We hear in the gospels the defense of the poor, the widows, the prisoner, the oppressed as urgent concerns,” Rev. Ferguson stated in his question to Ahmadinejad. “In your

speech to the General Assembly, you raised concerns about those nations who claim to defend human rights are actually the chief violators.”

He continued: “We extend this challenge to you, keeping in mind that all governments and all nations fall short of what God would have us do. This is also true for Iran. As an agenda of faith in God and with respect for all human rights, can we find a mechanism to talk about where Iran is seriously falling short in these human rights?”

Ahmadinejad replied, “The spirit of my concerns is the same as yours; I am very sad that the world is entangled with enmity, occupation, massacre, wars and discrimination.”

“I am also seriously concerned about the broad violation of human rights,” he continued, adding that “some violators of human rights try to solve the world problems merely at gunpoint. We still do not have a solid standard for human rights in the world, as there are various interpretations. It is possible to work together to assist in reaching a solid human rights standard.”

He ended his response saying that in Iran, “we have the highest possible standards regarding observing human rights.” The moderator raised the point about the violation of religious minorities’ rights in Iran, but it was not addressed due to time constraints.

This was the third in a series of conversations with Ahmadinejad organized by the Mennonites. The first meeting took place exactly one year ago in New York and the second in Teheran during February, 2007 when a religious delegation visited Iran.

Indeed, the “walls of silence and avoidance must come down,” said Fr. Drew Christiansen, editor of the Catholic magazine *America*, reiterating that “it is wrong to not engage in dialogue with those we disagree, as this only spreads prejudice and ill-will.”

- **WCC Welcomes letter from Muslim leaders entitled “A Common Word between Us and You,” 15 October 2007**

“This letter is most welcome,” said World Council of Churches (WCC) general secretary Rev. Dr Samuel Kobia, especially at a time when *“all of humanity is looking to religious leaders for guidance as to how to respond to the situation of violence in the world”*. *Kobia was commenting on the letter “A Common Word between Us and You,”* saying that it *“gives a lot of hope”*.

With the signature of some 140 Muslim leaders, the letter was addressed to a number of world Christian leaders including Kobia last week, and arrived on the occasion of “Eid al-Fitr al-Mubarak”, the festivity that marks the end of Ramadan, the Muslims’ holiest month.

According to Kobia, the letter "is significant in that it is signed by such a large group of Muslim leaders and scholars from around the world, which makes it unprecedented. Such a rare unity of purpose gives a lot of hope as to what people of faith can achieve together."

The WCC general secretary stressed that "the timing of this letter is also important. Today all of humanity is looking to religious leaders for guidance as to how to respond to the situation of violence in the world."

Kobia affirmed that "the WCC is ready to cooperate with those who have sent this letter by participating in putting together a concrete process to implement what is being suggested."

With over 30 years of work in interreligious relations and dialogue, the WCC is today turning its emphasis to a cooperation which strives to constructively address religion-fuelled conflicts in contemporary plural societies.

- **Minute on our religious imperative to foster sensitivity and reconciliation in a shifting society, adopted by WCC central committee, Geneva, Switzerland, 13–20 February 2008**

1. In recent years, there have been intense social upheavals emerging from insult, injury and offence aimed at religious communities. The causes of these conflicts are complex and often result from migration and other effects of globalization. Some, in once stable communities in Europe for instance, view these shifts in cultural and religious identities as a threat, leading to xenophobic reactions.
2. Migrants, quite often deeply rooted in religious traditions and practices, bring new dimensions to public debates that both enrich and challenge established secular patterns of life. These new challenges, including those occasioned by the displacement of traditional religious communities, find expression in intensive debates about the role of religion in the public and political realm, and in particular in the tension between freedom of expression and respect for religious symbols and values.
3. In this context, we echo the concern expressed in the Netherlands and in other parts of the world following rumours of the release of a film against the Qur'an by a Dutch member of parliament.
4. As a fellowship of churches we recall the clear and unequivocal biblical injunction to "love the stranger" in our midst (Deuteronomy 10:19) and that in Jesus' teaching to love our neighbour, the neighbour is often the one we do not recognize (Luke 10:25-37).

5. We affirm that it is imperative that we address the fears and insults that are experienced by all the communities involved in such situations. The “Minute on mutual respect, responsibility and dialogue with people of other faiths,” approved at Porto Alegre in 2006, provides a framework for those churches who wish to do so.

Recalling also that some of our churches, particularly those in Asia, Africa and the Middle East have centuries-long experience living in communities of religious and cultural diversity, the central committee of the World Council of Churches, meeting in Geneva, Switzerland, 13-20 February 2008:

- A. **Recommends** to churches facing such challenges to seek opportunities for networking to share the expertise and wisdom of the member churches with experience in living in religious and cultural diversity;
- B. **Encourages** member churches to actively generate a climate of deep respect, communication and mutual understanding in the public sphere by engaging opinion leaders, mass media and other community leaders to emphasize the positive contribution that people of religious faith make to national and community life;
- C. **Affirms** the unique and strategic role, as well as the moral responsibility, of religious leaders to work towards reconciliation and healing within their own and between communities, and **encourages** Christian leaders to initiate and facilitate processes that lead communities not only from hostility to peaceful co-existence but also to celebrations of our common life;
- D. **Urges** Christian leaders to speak directly, consistently and self-critically to their own communities, holding them to the highest ethical standards of loving one’s neighbour, and in extending a hand of reconciliation to communities other than one’s own, whenever a community, its people and their beliefs have been attacked or insulted;
- E. **Calls** upon Christian communities to seek common cause with other religious communities to respond to crises that occur in such a way as to model a non-violent and respectful solution.

- **Letter from WCC general secretary to HRH Prince Ghazi bin Muhammad bin Talal of Jordan in response to the letter *A Common Word Between Us and You*, 18 March 2008**

Your Royal Highness, Eminent signatories of *A Common Word Between Us and You*,

Greetings in the name of the One God, whom we love and who loves us.

I received your letter to Christian leaders, *A Common Word*, with great joy and hope. I read it as a representative expression of the Muslim will to engage with the Christian community in dialogue for the sake of justice and world peace. I recognize and welcome the serious intent of *A Common Word* and your invitation to explore our shared concerns and visions for our common humanity.

The member churches of the World Council of Churches have for several decades been engaged in relationships with people of other faiths, especially with Muslims. The outcomes of the joint work include *Striving Together in Dialogue: A Muslim-Christian Call to Reflection and Action* (2001), which notes:

While it is true that the complex history of Christian-Muslim relations has known much rivalry and war, it is often forgotten that there were rich and fertile encounters in the realms of life and ideas alike. Unfortunately, one of the features of our historical memories has been the way in which conflicts overshadow peaceful experiences and accusations drown the voices of understanding. Something similar happens at the level of religious views, when perceptions of difference displace common or shared principles.

The WCC welcomes the initiative and opportunity *A Common Word* represents, and will encourage our member churches and ecumenical partners to engage constructively and positively with their Muslim neighbours in the various local situations throughout the world, and in the light of your letter we confidently look forward to you and your colleagues to reciprocate. *Striving Together* confirms that:

Relations between Muslims and Christians are usually strongly influenced by local and regional histories and events. But broader developments also have a significant impact, especially when they contribute to destabilising societies previously characterised by peaceful relations of mutual acceptance. In situations where uncertainties of change begin to be felt, suspicion and fear can build up between communities leading to tension and possibly conflict.

Since my letter to you of 6 December 2007, we have commenced consultations with member churches and ecumenical partners, a number of whom responded with great enthusiasm. In the spirit of your invitation to a shared endeavour, I called a meeting of scholars engaged in the field of Christian-Muslim relations, representing member churches and wider ecumenical circles. Their deliberations produced a document entitled *Learning to Explore Love Together*, which I have sent to the member churches. This document is intended to encourage the churches to read and reflect on your Letter and engage constructively with their Muslim neighbours in exploring common concerns.

I have also offered the World Council of Churches' good offices to support our member churches' engagement with their Muslim neighbours. Specifically, I have asked our Interreligious Dialogue and Cooperation programme staff to make a response to your initiative a top priority.

I want to take this opportunity to initiate a conversation with you about face-to-face dialogue events between you, the authors of *A Common Word*, and your Christian counterparts in order to expand and deepen the understanding between us of loving God and loving neighbour.

As a first step in preparing for such dialogue events, I would like to suggest that we together create a joint Muslim-Christian working group that will produce the plans, create the agendas and issue invitations.

I have instructed my programme staff in Interreligious Dialogue and Cooperation to be in contact with your staff to explore further how a constructive cooperation might take shape so that we may move into the next phase of our relationship based on shared principles and a shared agenda.

Given the tremendous opportunity *A Common Word* presents, let me offer to send a delegation to Amman later this spring, perhaps in April or May, to meet with you to discuss further how a constructive cooperation might take shape so that we may move into the next phase of our relationship based on shared principles and a shared agenda.

I look forward to your response, and to the possibility of meeting face-to-face in the near future.

With my sincere wishes for peace,
Rev. Dr Samuel Kobia
General secretary

- **Commentary from WCC general secretary to member churches in response to the letter *A Common Word Between Us and You*, written by 138 Muslim scholars and sent to Christian leaders worldwide, 20 March 2008**

LEARNING TO EXPLORE LOVE TOGETHER Suggestions to the churches for responding to “*A Common Word*”

Preamble

On 13 October 2007 a group of 138 Muslim scholars addressed an open letter to Christian leaders. Among those addressed was the general secretary of the World Council of Churches. Based on initial responses from member churches, the WCC initiated a process of responding to the letter. Since November 2007 the WCC commenced consultation with its member churches and ecumenical partners, a number of whom responded with great enthusiasm. This was followed by a meeting of scholars and church experts engaged in the field of Christian-Muslim relations. Their deliberations produced the following commentary on the letter entitled “Learning to Explore Love Together”. The commentary is intended to assist the churches in reading and responding to the letter “*A Common*

Word”. The document includes suggestions to encourage member churches and ecumenical partners in their reflection on the letter and in its invitation to explore together with Muslim fellows the love of God and the love of neighbour in their respective contexts. Churches and ecumenical partners are then invited to share their reflections with the WCC as a contribution to a common understanding of and a common response to this initiative. The ongoing process of reflection and the desire to create a common response to the letter through an initiative of dialogue is described below.

A letter from 138 Muslim scholars

The letter, entitled *A Common Word between Us and You* (drawing upon an invitation to conversation in common between Christians and Muslims that appears in the Qur’an), sets out key dimensions of belief and action that in its authors’ understanding followers of the two faiths hold in common. They sum these up in the two-fold commandments of love expressed in the Bible: ‘You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind, and your neighbour as yourself’. To this end, by citing verses from the Bible, the Qur’an and Hadith (the sayings of the Prophet Muhammad), the letter briefly shows how Christians and Muslims share similar teachings about love for God and love for neighbour. On the basis of these shared teachings, the authors then issue an invitation to Christians to join together with them ‘on the common essentials of our two religions’. They also make clear that there are differences between Christianity and Islam, and counsel that ‘there is no minimizing some of our formal differences’. But they recall that since 55% of the world’s population belongs to these two religions, “making the relationship between these two religious communities [is] the most important factor in contributing to meaningful peace around the world. If Muslims and Christians are not at peace, the world cannot be at peace.”

This invitation marks an encouraging new stage in Muslim thinking about relations between Muslims and Christians. Throughout their shared history, followers of the two faiths have too often misunderstood one another. In recent times, a new way of thinking about the other took place; the churches have begun to think afresh about the relationship between Christianity and other faiths, including Islam – prominent among the outcomes of this thinking are the Roman Catholic Church’s *Declaration on Relations between the Church and non-Christian Religions*, 1965, and the World Council of Churches’ *Guidelines on Dialogue with People of Living Faiths and Ideologies*, 1979. Here, in *A Common Word* is a clear indication that leading Muslim intellectuals and religious leaders are committed to fresh thinking about the relationship between Islam and Christianity. The courage of their action must be applauded – and since then around one hundred more scholars have signed the Letter – and the sincerity of their gesture must be welcomed in the warmest terms.

Ways towards a response

After consultation with its member churches and ecumenical partners, and with the advice of specialists, the World Council of Churches proposes to initiate a process that, with patient reflection and mutual exploration between the people of the churches and the people of the mosques, can lead to fresh awareness one of the other, abandonment of

stubborn prejudices, and new ways forward in respect and cooperation.

The following steps summarize the process:

- The World Council of Churches encourages its member churches and ecumenical partners, to recognize and welcome the serious intent of *A Common Word* and prayerfully consider its invitation to dialogue and cooperation. It also invites them to reflect ecumenically on the content of the letter in their own unique contexts. While acknowledging that some churches have already begun this journey, the present document is aimed at facilitating and deepening such endeavours.
- The Council will call on its Muslim partners – especially the signatories to the letter – to create a joint *planning group* to prepare steps towards common action, and seek joint Muslim and Christian initiatives of dialogue and cooperation at both the regional and global levels.
- The Council will propose to this group, the organizing a series of consultations between Muslim and Christian leaders, scholars and practitioners which, based on this new opportunity, will reflect on points of mutual understanding, work on a theological and ethical framework for future joint initiatives and establish new means of exploring further in both matters of faith and life.

These steps are taken on the understanding that the invitation in the letter is issued by its signatories in full awareness of the difficulties that have accompanied past efforts, and that it signals a new and vigorously energized desire for a fresh start.

Exploring together the love for God and love for neighbour

The letter eloquently underlines similarities on the key points of love for God and love for neighbour which both Christians and Muslims respect. However, the differences between the ways in which they each understand these imperatives and put them into practice cannot be ignored.

The testimony of past and present writings by Muslims and Christians about and against the other serves as a clear reminder that misunderstanding can easily arise when followers of each faith try to explore the other's beliefs without proper care and attention. Therefore, it must be stated unequivocally that Christians should be ready to learn about Islam by listening closely to what Muslims themselves teach, and that Muslims should be ready to learn about Christianity by listening closely to what Christians themselves teach. Presuppositions are to be put aside, and followers of both faiths must be ready to seek the learning and wisdom of the other as the other imparts it according to their own unique insights.

Exploration of love for God together will undoubtedly yield startlingly instructive insights for both Christians and Muslims. In the same way, exploration of love for neighbour together will reveal many points on which Muslims and Christians will

recognize commonly held principles and actions. But these signs of similarity must be held in tension with real divergences and hard to reconcile differences.

Thus, for example, while both Christians and Muslims say they perceive God as one, what is actually meant in Islam by the doctrine of *Tawhid* (Unity of God), and what is actually meant in Christianity by the doctrine of the Trinity? Are these contradictory doctrines, as the history of engagement between the two faiths attests, or is there a way in which they can be seen as complementary insights into the mystery of God?

Similarly, while both Muslims and Christians claim to receive revelation from God, what is meant when Muslims claim to perceive the will of God revealed in the Qur'an – what has been called the Word of God become book-, and what is meant when Christians claim to perceive God's self-revealed in Jesus Christ – who is called the Word of God become flesh?

In the same way, the love of neighbour is an essential and integral part of faith in God and love of God in both religions. Both Christians and Muslims obey God by seeking to respond to need in society. In Islam loving one's own neighbour is expressed in acting with responsibility and generosity towards the needy within the community. In Christianity the love of neighbour is seen as a reflection of God's love to humanity through Jesus Christ. This love transcends geographical and religious boundaries and thus embraces humanity in all its components without exception as it is expressed in the parable of the Good Samaritan.

The concept of love of God and love of neighbour is but one bridge and point of dialogue for action, at the same time Christian-Muslim dialogue and cooperation should explore a common ground in the search for justice and peace.

Agreeing and disagreeing in respect and love

While Christians and Muslims may often be surprised to recognize in the utterances and explanations of the other what can appear to be reflections of their own beliefs, they will also see stark divergences in emphasis and some clear differences that resist all resolution by mutual efforts. Not the least of these will be the Christian difficulty of appreciating Muhammad as a prophet, and the Muslim difficulty of appreciating Jesus as God incarnate. These spring from sincerely held views that have been keenly defended for centuries, and as keenly questioned and rejected.

It is therefore a pressing necessity that while Christians and Muslims must find ways of enhancing what they hold in common, they must also find ways of acknowledging and respecting the differences between them, of attempting to understand these, and of not allowing them to fuel hostility. The degeneration into mutual recrimination and condemnation is a pattern that has been repeated in the past to the sorrow of people of good will, who would also acknowledge with regret the ways in which religion has been misused. This may easily continue in the future unless careful steps are taken to prevent it.

With understanding the plurality and complexity of their shared history, both Christians and Muslims must work hard to develop respect where understanding is difficult and trust where differences do not yield to inquiry. In full recognition of the long history they hold in common, while recalling examples of humane mutual respect, they must recognize the need to work actively to heal hurts both local and global, and to change attitudes and stereotypes. Member churches are encouraged to recall and learn from each other's experiences, and examine how these might inform and challenge their future actions.

More than this, even when Christians and Muslims continue to disagree on matters of belief, they should strive to reach the point at which they can recognize and endorse what they hold in common with sufficient integrity to allow them to work together in the world. Thus, they should make it a priority to understand how the precious heritages they each hold can direct and even impel them to work together for justice and peace, recognizing their joint goals and responding to the call of the One they worship and obey to come together not only in a common word but also in common action for the greater glory of God and the wellbeing of all.

- **Statement from the WCC director of Interreligious Dialogue and Cooperation criticizing the movie *Fitna*, released online by Dutch parliamentarian Geert Wilders, 28 March 2008**

WCC criticizes Islamophobic film, calls for mutual respect

The movie *Fitna*, recently released online by Dutch parliamentarian Geert Wilders, was criticized as "a clear case of Islamophobia" by Rev. Dr Shanta Premawardhana, director of the World Council of Churches' (WCC) Programme on Interreligious Dialogue and Cooperation.

"Through graphic images the filmmaker depicts violent extremism without any attempt to distinguish it from mainstream Islam. Extremism is a problem for most religions and needs to be countered through interreligious dialogue," Premawardhana said.

Dutch church representatives have also voiced their criticism of the right-wing politician turned filmmaker, stressing that his views were opposed by most of the Dutch population, the ecumenical news-agency ENI reported today.

Seeking to encourage churches to initiate such dialogues, particularly in the interreligious environment of Europe, the central committee of the WCC in February issued a "Minute on our religious imperative to foster sensitivity and reconciliation in shifting society." It encourages churches to "actively generate a climate of deep respect" that would lead communities "not only from hostility to peaceful co-existence, but also to celebrations of our common life".

The central committee's statement also calls upon religious leaders "to work towards reconciliation and healing"; and urges Christian leaders "to speak directly, consistently and self-critically to their own communities, holding them to the highest ethical standards of loving one's neighbour, and in extending a hand of reconciliation to communities other than one's own, whenever a community, its people and their beliefs have been attacked or insulted."

- **Address by Metropolitan Emmanuel (Adamakis) of France speaking on behalf of the WCC at the World Conference on Dialogue, Madrid, Spain, 18 July 2008**

The importance of dialogue in contemporary multicultural society

Your Eminences,
Your Excellencies,
Dear Participants,

First of all, please allow me to congratulate the organizers of this important initiative, and especially express my gratitude to the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques of Islam, King Abdullah Ibn Abdul Aziz Al-Saud of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, as well as the Muslim World League. Such conferences highlight the need we all have to communicate with one another despite our differences in creed. Please allow me also to extend my warmest congratulations to His Majesty, King Juan Carlos of Spain and the hospitable land of the kingdom of Spain for the organization of this important event. Our multicultural world together with its religious pluralism has brought us all together and the only way we will be able not only to peacefully coexist, but also to understand each other, is by listening to one another. Therefore, it is a great pleasure and honour to address all of you here today and extend the greetings of His All Holiness the Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew, as well as of the World Council of Churches, an international organization of Anglican, Orthodox and Protestant churches worldwide, both of whom I represent here today.

Interreligious dialogue has been at the top of the pastoral concern and agenda of the Ecumenical Patriarchate for a long time. The Orthodox Church, and in particular the Ecumenical Patriarchate, for years has shown its dedication and support of intercultural and interreligious dialogue and the possibility of the coexistence of the peoples who come from different cultural traditions. The same applies of course to the World Council of Churches that continuously works for the promotion of interreligious dialogue throughout the world.

There are certain circles in the world today which believe that churches and religions should have no say whatsoever in society and that in religions lies the source of conflicts on an international level. We cannot deny the fact that there are people who wish to use

and abuse religion as a source of conflict. As His All Holiness Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew said, addressing the plenary of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe in Strasbourg, “It is well known that the inhabitants of our planet confess many religions, and that on many occasions a variety of tendencies and denominations have developed within each religion, at many times with contradictory beliefs. It is also known from history that often in the past, and on certain occasions even in our times, religious reasons were put forth to provoke individuals, or even entire peoples, to warfare or to enliven the militancy of those involved. However, we at least – the people of so-called western civilization – have been convinced that pure religious faith in itself does not find any pleasure in engaging its followers in warfare and conflicts with the faithful of other religions, for the truth does not walk along either with militant power nor with numerical, or any other, superiority. “The truth is known through the Word and the personal experience of it in a pure and selfless heart.” Let us not forget the statement of the 1992 Berne Declaration, the 1994 Bosphorus Declaration and the 2001 Brussels Declaration that “a crime committed in the name of religion is a crime against religion.”

Our deep and abiding spirituality stands in stark contrast to the secularism of modern politics. The failure of anthropocentric ideologies has left a void in many lives – the frantic pursuit of the future has sacrificed the stability of the past. Communities of faith can balance secular humanism and nationalism with spiritual humanism and ecumenism – and we can temper the mindless pursuit of modernity with our own healthy respect for tradition. But we can only do this if we are united in the spirit of the one God, "Creator of all things visible and invisible": Christians, Jews and Muslims alike, as well as all other religions and communities of faith who are present here. And although we cannot deny our differences, neither can we deny the need for alliance and teamwork to help lead our world away from the bloody abyss of extreme nationalism and intolerance. For it is precisely when we disagree that we have the greatest opportunity to demonstrate tolerance.

Furthermore, allow me to highlight several points that manifest our guidelines for interreligious dialogue in general. We believe that:

1. religions are not and should be not at the disposal of peoples to disturb the heavenly peace of God with the unacceptable hysteria leading to warfare on earth;
2. religions are not willing to ignore their teachings regarding the unity of mankind in order to serve recent ideologies of division and social conflicts;
3. religions are not willing and are not at the disposal of those who believe that they should replace exegesis of their teachings on peace and justice in the world for the sake of contemporary ideologies, such as “war of all against all”;
4. religions are willing, through the means of interreligious dialogue, to find ways to serve together with more efficacy and responsibility the suffering humanity of our times;
5. religions are willing to bring together their contributions for educational programs which will promote the mutual respect and sincere understanding among peoples of different cultures and religions in order to progressively overcome the unhealthy phenomena of blind fanaticism and religious intransigence;
6. religions are willing to collaborate within the context of the contemporary ecumenical dialogue in order to defend peace, social justice, and human rights in the

relations among peoples regardless of their religions, nationalities, races, social status or other kinds of discrimination;

7. religions are willing to support the governments of their peoples and the international organizations for a better understanding of the fundamental principles for the peaceful coexistence of all peoples.

In a culturally diverse Europe it is vital that we engage in authentic and sincere dialogue, such as this one, built on respect for the dignity of every human person created – as we Christians firmly believe – in the image and likeness of God. The faithful of all religions manifest their obedience to the Creator, who wishes all people to live in the dignity that the Creator has granted them. Interreligious challenges are part not only of Europe's multi-faith societies, but of multi faith societies around the globe, in which we seek to advocate and protect the dignity of the individual. Let us all keep in mind our common Abrahamic roots, as well as the common desire of all religions to safeguard our world, so that we can realize a future worthy for the generations to come, all of us together, regardless of our different religions and cultural backgrounds. Let us all stand united in the face of our globalized world.

Thank you very much.

- **International dialogue between religious leaders from Christian, Jewish, Muslim and other faith traditions and political figures exploring faith perspectives and the role of religion regarding global issues, 25 September 2008**

Religious and political leaders dialogue on the role of religions in peace

The United Nations Liaison Office of the World Council of Churches (WCC) co-sponsored an international dialogue on September 25 between some 300 religious leaders and political figures – including Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad – aimed at exploring faith perspectives and the role of religion regarding global issues such as poverty, war and prejudice while deepening mutual understanding.

The event, which was called “Has not one God created us? The significance of religious leaders contributing peace” included Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, President of the United Nations General Assembly Rev. Miguel d’Escoto Brockmann, former Norwegian Prime Minister Rev. Kjell Bondevik, and Jewish Renewal movement leader Rabbi Lynn Gottlieb.

Aimed at exploring faith perspectives and the role of religion regarding global issues, “the event demonstrated both the power and potential of religious leaders contributing to peace” said Rev. Christopher Ferguson, WCC Representative to the United Nations.

The evening which brought together religious leaders from Christian, Muslim, Jewish, Zoroastrian, Buddhist and other faith traditions was co-sponsored by the WCC United Nations Liaison Office, Mennonite central committee, American Friends Service Committee and Religions for Peace.

Critical questions of how religions inform human rights and concerns over human rights violations, nuclear arms, religious oppression, and environmental abuse, in countries including the United States, Israel, Palestine and Iran, were all part of the evening's dialogue.

"While there were points of contention and clear disagreements, the event reaffirmed that religious traditions insist on dialogue, respect and love for peace making," Ferguson said.

Prayers from various faith traditions were offered to begin the discussion. A panel of religious and political leaders, using sacred texts, offered what their respective faith tradition brings to the struggle to eliminate poverty, injustice, global warming and war.

D. John Brademas, a former U.S. congressman and president emeritus of New York University, served as the event moderator. Brademas, along with several of the evening's speakers, called for direct negotiations between Iran and the United States.

"We believe that war is not the solution to the differences that divide peoples," Brademas said. "Dialogue can make a real difference."

Rabbi Gottlieb spoke of the place of peacemaking and nonviolence in Torah and tradition and her work between Muslims and Jews and Palestinian and Israelis.

"Torah councils us that no matter what problems face us, we are to engage in solutions through dialogue, reconciliation and peace building measures, as it is written, the entire Torah is for the sake of peace," noted Gottlieb. "Dialogue brings many perspectives together, gives special attention to minority opinions and must be conducted by treating everyone with respect."

Nihad Awad, executive director of the Council on American-Islamic Relations, emphasized Islamic principles to alleviate poverty, care for the environment, affirm the equality of all human souls, and work for peace and justice.

The Rev. Miguel d'Escoto Brockmann, president of the UN General Assembly, said that love was a guiding principle common to all religions. "When we do not see each other as brothers and sisters, we reject God," he noted.

Pres. Ahmadinejad spoke of the commonalities of religions, the fundamental place of justice, and the essential role religion plays in the spiritual, moral and legislative fabric of society. He stressed the dire situation facing the world and called with urgency for religious groups to contribute to peace building.

Ferguson, who presented the evening's summation, noted the commonalities presented by the panel – all affirmed the place of dialogue for engagement, the fundamental place of justice to people of faith, and that our religious traditions direct us to love, dialogue and defend the rights of all persons.

Ferguson also noted that the evening was an example of the place of religion in dialogue and peace building. “In the midst of the current international crisis and tensions it became clear that religious leaders have much to contribute in peace making,” he noted.

This dialogue was the fourth in an ongoing series of bridge-building encounters since 2006, which faith groups are developing with Iranian political, religious and academic leaders to encourage respectful conversation about the need for religious involvement in peacemaking.

The WCC has a long history of dialogue and relationship building with religious, cultural and political leaders in Iran.

- **Keynote lecture given by Catholicos Aram I: “Living as a Community with Islam – Concerns, Challenges and Promises” at an ecumenical consultation of church leaders and experts on Christian-Muslim dialogue, Geneva, Switzerland, 18-20 October 2008**

Christians and Muslims have co-existed for centuries in different geo-political contexts and under changing circumstances. This co-existence has taken multiple shapes, generating coherence and tension, harmony and conflict. A realistic assessment of the present predicament of these relations is imperative. We must go beyond cosmetic approaches and clichés to discern the core issues and emerging challenges.

Salient features of Christian-Muslim relations

Looking at the present landscape of Christian-Muslim relations, it is important to identify four inter-related trends:

a) Ambiguous perception of religion

In the course of history religion has frequently been misused creating division and conflict. Christianity and Islam have not been exempt from this tendency. Some believe that religion has a public role to play, while others feel that it should be a private affair. For some, religion provides the basis for political governance and ideological orientation, while others believe that it has been hijacked by a political agenda; hence, while some people believe that ‘de-politicization’ of religion and ‘de-religionization’ of politics are imperative, others believe that there should be no demarcation line between religion, nation and state. Because of these opposing perceptions, religion has become a source of conflict in societies. The concrete implications of these contradictory images of religion are identifiable in many areas of society life.

Referring to this present predicament of religion, Charles Kimball reminds us that "several best-selling books have agreed forcefully that religion is the problem".²⁷ In my view, religion is not the problem. It was made part of the problem. The very vocation of religion as a moral authority is to seek solutions to problems that we face in the world today. In order to fulfil its vocation, the two dimensions of religion, namely, as a God-given truth and as a human response, need to be distinguished. Tension between the "other-worldly" and "this-worldly" manifestations of religion, and the incompatibility between the teachings and practice of religion need to be reconciled. Both absolutizing and relativizing religion may have negative consequences. Can we break these misperceptions and ambiguities and articulate the true image of religion? Christianity and Islam have rich resources to engage in such a process.

b) Misconception about Islam and Christianity

In spite of the significant growth of Muslim-Christian dialogue and relations, Muslims and Christians continue to misconstrue each other's religion. Generally speaking, Islam is portrayed by the West as a source of hatred, fundamentalism and violence. Deep in the consciousness of many Muslims, Western Christianity is the cause of moral decay, and is identified with the Crusades, colonialism, and secularism.

These memories and images pertaining to Islam and Christianity have generated a crisis of confidence. Furthermore, manipulation of religious symbols, slogans and banners to promote non-religious agendas has deepened the intolerance. Therefore, allegations, stereotypes and prejudices must be seriously addressed, and collective memories must be purified. This is an extremely urgent task facing Christian-Muslim dialogue.

c) Collision of values

Religion is not only faith in a transcendent reality, it is also a value system that governs human life and provides the basis for self-understanding. Rooted in belief systems, values are perceived as forces of cohesion and integration in societies. They may also become forces of destabilization and tension when used for ideological, nationalistic and political ends. Values carry with them memories and thus condition attitudes and determine relations. Exclusive religious claims lead to exclusive expressions of values, which in turn lead to intolerance.

A number of incidents that have occurred in the last decade in different parts of the world, along with their ensuing reactions and counter reactions, point to a deepening malaise in Christian-Muslim relations: exclusive and reductionist attitudes towards each other provoke tension; values conditioned by extremist religious claims and ideologies expose societies to confrontation; even indirect remarks "in the name of freedom of speech" spark outright rage; and the fear of an "evil other", whether identified by a name, country or religion, creates distrust and divides people.

²⁷ C. Kimball, *When Religion Becomes Evil*, New York, 2008 p. VIII

What is happening is not a "clash of civilizations"²⁸ or "clash of fundamentalisms".²⁹ It is a clash of values,³⁰ deeply rooted in our belief systems and stirred by bitter memories. Differences imprison us in mutual fear unless we transcend them to discover our common eco-centre. Bitter memories deepen the divide unless they are healed through a transformative process. Rather than opting to confront each other, we must strive together to pull down the wall of ignorance, arrogance and suspicion. Dialogue should challenge us to accept each other the way we are.

d) Self-contained or interactive self-understanding?

Identity is sustained by values and religious beliefs. Faithfulness to identity implies strong attachment to values and religious beliefs. Globalization has destroyed the fences that used to protect this specific identity and, in its place, has produced its own identity. As a result, we see two contradictory reactions: one is characterized by the defining of one's self-understanding in opposition to the other; the other, which is proactive, is marked by creative openness and dynamic interaction with the other. The first way of being is labelled today as radicalism or fundamentalism; it rejects the other. The second way of being is labelled as moderate and tolerant; it accepts the other.

These two ways of self-understanding are in collision in many societies. This collision is identifiable both in intra-religious and interreligious contexts. Dogmatic approaches, ossified thinking and frozen attitudes will only enhance alienation. Islam and Christianity are called to redefine their self-understanding, as well as the way they understand each other in a new world context.

A serious and frank Christian-Muslim dialogue cannot ignore these trends and tendencies outlined above. The prevailing misperceptions, ambiguities, polarizations, tensions and collision, hijacked and sharpened by politico-ideological agendas and geo-political strategies, can be transformed only through a shared life in community (*ayyish-el-moushtarak*). I believe that for both Christians and Muslims, living-in-community must become the real objective of their dialogue. On the way towards this common goal, there are problems and challenges. Neither the "war on terror" nor self-alienation is the right path to follow. We must not deal with symptoms, but with deeply rooted wounds, through a careful diagnosis and in the spirit of mutual respect and trust.

Living together as community: a critical urgency

"Dialogue stems from a profound recognition of the mutuality of our common life".³¹ Mutuality builds community and community presupposes and imposes mutuality. Indeed, living together as community is a human necessity. Growing awareness towards common interests, concerns and destiny in a globalized world gave an acute urgency to living together. Because of their common roots and a long history of cohabitation, Christians and Muslims have further reasons to share a common life together.

²⁸ S. Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order*, New York, 1996.

²⁹ T. Ali, *The Clash of Fundamentalisms: Crusades, Jihads and Modernity*, London, 2002.

³⁰ Aram I, *For a Church beyond its Walls*, Antelias, 2007, p. 272.

³¹ S.J. Samartha (ed.) *Dialogue between Men of Living Faiths*, Geneva, 1971, p. 20.

For centuries, Christians and Muslims in the Middle East have lived as co-citizens sharing a common history. Together they have developed Arab nationalism and have fought against Ottoman-Turkish hegemony, Western colonialism and Zionism. Yet, they have not been able to transform cohabitation into a wider community. Nation-building has acquired predominance over community building.

In Western societies, Muslim migrants have established their own communities, preserving their own values, religious beliefs, traditions and language. These communities have remained self-contained on the fringes of society life, and have not been integrated into the total fabric of society. Integration remains an acute problem in Europe.

Community-building with Islam is a great challenge and an urgent necessity. Community building must take place on the basis of equal rights and obligations, as well as full and active participation in all aspects of society life, including decision-making. In this context there are conflictive issues and crucial questions which require frank discussion and a comprehensive scrutiny. Our divergences must be neither concealed nor absolutized, neither ignored nor dramatized. We must spell out converging as well as diverging points and identify concrete areas of tension. These two monotheistic faiths are not monolithic. Therefore, generalizations must be avoided; contextualization is the right way of assessing and organizing Christian-Muslim dialogue and relations. In my view, these are the most divisive issues to be treated in Christian-Muslim dialogue.

a) Inter-complementarity of faith and reason.

Christianity and Islam recognize the specific place and role of revelation and reason in their belief systems. They have however different perspectives as to the interconnectedness of the cognitive and transcendental dimensions of faith. God's revelation is perceived by Islam as absolute. Muslims believe that the Qur'an is literally the word of God and as such is immutable. This is not the way many Christians consider the Bible, which contains the revelation of God. Being written by divinely inspired people the Bible needs interpretation. These quiet different perceptions as to the nature and the scope of infallibility of these two sacred books have concrete implications on almost all aspects of the life and practice of these faiths.

The ethos of Islamic thought, action and life is theological. Islam has even, in a sense, "theologized" reason and has not developed a rationalistic tradition.³² Rationality is at the heart of the ethos of Christianity. Even spirituality and mysticism have given way to rationality, especially in Western Christianity.

Both rationalization and de-rationalization of faith is full of dangers. Calling into question the certitude of truth may threaten the foundation of religion. Governing human life by transcendental truth claims may question the credibility and relevance of religion. Reason

³² H. Bashiriyeh, "A Critical Examination of Reason in Western and Islamic philosophies: The Limits of Dialogue between Islam and the West", *Dialogue*, Spring 2001 N. 3, pp. 89-90.

has a role in the human search for truth. But when reason overwhelms the faith, then reason becomes an instrument of evil. When the imperatives of faith are considered beyond the purview of rational discourse, then faith becomes exposed to the ambiguities and polarizations of the world.

Christianity and Islam hold that their beliefs are not simply human constructs, but that they have a transcendent source. They believe that reason and faith are partners rather than rivals. Criticizing the "exaggerated rationalism" and "extreme fideism", the papal encyclical *Fides et Ratio* (2001) has emphasized the necessity of reconciliation between faith and reason. In a recent open letter to the Pope a group of Muslim scholars stated that "there are two extremes which the Islamic intellectual tradition has generally managed to avoid: one is to make the analytical mind the ultimate arbiter of truth and the other is to deny the power of human understanding to address ultimate questions".³³ The relation of faith and reason is a critical area of deeper investigation.

b) Islamic law (*Shariah*) and human rights

Majority-minority relations either in a predominantly Muslim or Christian country raises basic concerns and questions.

The Islamic society is governed by Islamic law (*Shariah*), which through rules, laws, values, criteria, ethics, worship and practices outlines the way of life that Muslims are supposed to follow individually and collectively. *Shariah* also includes a system of jurisprudence (*fiqh*). *Shariah* is considered by Christians to be a system of governance, which creates socio-political marginalization and threatens religious freedom. Originally meant to safeguard the rights of Christians in a country of Muslim majority, *Dhimmi* too is perceived by Christians as denoting a category of second-class citizenship.

Perception and implementation of Islamic law has different connotations and implications in Muslim countries. When *dhimmi* was introduced the concept of citizenship did not exist. Today, there is a new system of governance based on citizenship. For some Muslims the problem is that citizenship is not applied and respected as ensuring equality between people belonging to the same country. The discriminatory policies at home of some countries, such as Turkey, contradict their teachings of tolerance abroad.³⁴ Some Muslim countries are democratic in form but dictatorial in essence and Muslims and Christians are equally affected by it.

According to many Christian scholars, contradiction between *Shariah* and basic human rights is evident:³⁵ hence, this matter needs in-depth discussion. There are voices in Islam that emphasize the necessity of accommodating the basic principles of human rights to the Muslim context. For example, the recent open letter of Muslim scholars stressed the

³³ <http://www.ammanmessage.com>

³⁴ In 1993 the UN declared the "International Declaration of Minority Rights" emphasizing that the protection of minority rights in a country is no longer an internal affair but a matter of international concern. In the Muslim world, this was considered a sort of pretext for the Western powers to interfere in the internal affairs of a Muslim country.

³⁵ In 1948 when the UN proclaimed the International Declaration of Human Rights and in 1989 the International Declaration of Children's Rights, several Muslims countries expressed their reservation in respect to some articles considering them conflicting with Islamic *Sharia*.

importance of "freedom of religion". This ambiguity and fear need to be addressed by Muslim leaders.³⁶

In the West, because they believe that many public laws are incompatible with *Sharia* law, Muslim communities feel isolated. For Muslims the culture of being a minority is a new reality. Because *Sharia* is a law to rule Muslims wherever they are a majority, in lands where they are a minority, a new understanding of *Sharia* is necessary. Recently, some voices have also raised the question of establishing a special jurisprudence for Muslim communities in order to seek that new understanding. In order to ensure a just basis for a pluralist society as well as to enhance integration and encourage participation in Europe, some believe that plurality of legal systems may be applied within one society having at the same time one basic law to all.

These are complex issues, which require on-going discussion. Reciprocity will significantly help Christians and Muslims to seek consensus on conflictive issues, to reconcile dilemmas and to build community. Our common humanity, common history and destiny will remain mere concepts if they are not supported by the crucial urgency of living together as community. Often religion fails to provide shared human rights values and hampers participation and integration. Therefore, without jeopardizing the specificity and integrity of religious belief systems, promoting a culture of human rights is a vital necessity and a common responsibility, and must be considered one of foci of Christian-Muslim dialogue.³⁷

c) Responding to secularism

Christianity and Islam affirm that human life cannot be understood without reference to the Transcendence, but they respond to this common challenge differently. Secularism is generally understood by many Muslims as anti-religious, a source of evil and rejection of God. Generally Christians avoid making a sharp dichotomy between secularization and Christianity and opt for a critical dialogue. Muslims resist secularism and Christians resist political Islam as an ideology and a system of governance. Both faiths affirm that governance must be sustained by ethical values.

Islam does not make a separation between temporal power and religious power. According to Islam, temporal authority needs religious legitimacy. For Christians a religious state cannot function democratically in a plural society, and separation of religion from state does not mean separation of religion from society. In the West religion is perceived as a private affair; while in Islam all aspects of human life are conditioned by religion. Western secularism stresses the individualistic understanding of a human being, a view that is challenged by Islam.

³⁶ M.M. Ayoub, "Islam and Pluralism", *Dialogue*, spring 2001, N.3, p. 107. These issues have been treated by Muslim and Christian scholars within the framework of a consultation organized by WCC's office on Interreligious Relations in 1995. See T. Mitri (ed.), *Religion, Law and Society*, Geneva, 1995.

³⁷ D. Muhammad Sammak, a prominent Muslim scholar with a rich experience in Christian-Muslim dialogue, in a recent lecture on "Human Dignity: An Islamic Perspective", says: "Human rights and minority rights pose fundamental challenges that face the normalization of relations between Islam and the West during the post-Cold War period".

The reaction of the Muslim world to secularism has been articulated in different ways: self-isolation to protect religious identity; going-back to the original roots of Islam (radicalism); and the Islamic revival movement. Expressed in different forms, this movement aims to apply *Shariah* law, develop a socio-economic and political system based on *Shariah* law, defend Muslim identity according to Islamic principles and promote Islamic moral and spiritual values.³⁸ There are significant differences among Muslims in respect to perception, methodology and implementation of these objectives. For some, progress and modernity are considered to be criteria for being a moderate Muslim. However, openness, shown particularly by some oil-rich Muslim countries, are not appreciated by conservative circles. There is also a growing trend in Islam to be receptive to modernity, but with an Islamic core.

In the West, the aggressive growth of secularism and uncritical openness to secular values have generated among Christians a forceful "return" of religion to public life as well as the emergence of spiritual-charismatic movements, some of them with syncretistic tendencies.

The clash between the sacred and secular, the spiritual and material and theocentric and anthropocentric approaches is identifiable in many aspects and spheres of society life. This concern is commonly shared by Christianity and Islam. Therefore, responding to secularism in a more effective way must occupy a prominent place on the agenda of Christian-Muslim dialogue.

d) Mission: conversion, witness or co-habitation?

Christianity and Islam are both missionary religions; they have an eschatological vision and claims for absolute truth and universality. Although missionary outreach is an essential dimension of Islam, it leaves the space to coexist with others within the framework of *dhimmi*. Christianity considers mission as *Missio Dei*; hence, it cannot surrender its missionary vocation and compromise on this fundamental affirmation of Christian faith. These competitive claims may lead to confrontation if they are not discussed seriously and seen in the right perspective.

We have always affirmed that plurality of religious traditions is "both the result of the manifold ways in which God has related to peoples and nations, as well as a manifestation of the richness and diversity of human response to God's gracious gift".³⁹ Respecting others' identity, claims and conviction does not mean compromising our own. Exclusive claims and uncompromising attitudes must not be opposed with confrontational spirit. We should approach this extremely sensitive issue proactively.

Both religions have painful memories in this respect. Christianity has always made clear the distinction between witness and proselytism. Witness to the Christ-event is the essential vocation of a Christian under all circumstances. We have also stated on many occasions that Christ may encounter us in the faith of our neighbour and that the Holy

³⁸ W. Saif, "Human Rights and Islamic Revivalism" in *Religion, Law and Society*, pp 121-122.

³⁹ "Religious Plurality and Christian Self-understanding," (a study document of WCC) p. 4.

Spirit may lead us to discern the divine presence in the faith of others. We have recognized that Christ may use us to transform the other. He may also use the other to teach and transform us.⁴⁰ Therefore, how can we develop a Logos-centred, not church-centred, theology of mission that embraces the 'other' without jeopardizing the "otherness" of the other? I believe that both faiths can engage in a creative interaction on the basis of their common affirmation that mission belongs to God, and that their intention is neither Christianization nor Islamization but transformation of the world and humanization of humanity.

From co-existing to living together

In my judgment, living together in community must take the centre stage of Christian-Muslim dialogue. Both faiths have common values and resources that promote life-in-community. The solid foundation of such a community is laid in a local context. Indeed, Christians and Muslims can build a shared life that encompasses and transcends differences at the local level:

a) By moving from isolation to integration

A community defines its self-understanding either in relation or in opposition to the other. Religion is regarded as an enemy of integration since its value system is uncompromising. Often religious identity generates isolation and threatens national unity. In the globalized world the other⁴¹ is no more a distant or undisclosed reality; he or she is our neighbour. Unconditional love of neighbour and hospitality towards the stranger are essential features of the two faiths (Mark, 12: 29-31; Quran 3rd Sura).⁴² We must therefore build a quality of relationship with our neighbour that enhances a deeper and holistic self-understanding and a greater understanding of the other, and which leads us from estrangement to a common life together.

A society is composed of multiple identities. Co-existence of these identities remains a potential source of conflict when they are not integrated into a coherent whole. Community building presupposes a quality of integration that provides equal opportunity, ensures diversity and enhances mutual acceptance. Ethnic, political and cultural factors and considerations establish demarcation lines; religions with their common values must become bridges of interaction. A harmonious interaction between religious identity and national loyalty is crucial. This is the most effective way of arriving at integration.

b) By moving from exclusion to participation

⁴⁰ See "Religious Plurality"; Aram I, *For a Church*, pp. 95-121. Cf. also the conferences of the Commission of World Mission and Evangelism (CWME).

⁴¹ The concept of "other" is crucial in interreligious dialogue. The otherness of the other is a source of enrichment. The more we take a distance from ourselves and discover the other, the more we discover ourselves. To identify commonalities in respect to the concept of "other", it is worth reading the following Jewish, Christian and Muslim perspectives: J. Sacks, *The Dignity of Difference: How to Avoid the Clash of Civilizations*, London, 2002; Aram I, *For a Church*, pp. 108-112, 253-285; M. Sammak, "Human Dignity".

⁴² The recent letter of Muslim scholars, "A Common Word between Us and You" has emphasized the crucial importance of neighbourhood as a basic value. The idea of hospitality has been spelled out as a common value in "Religious Plurality".

When minorities are considered as outsiders, there is no community. When in a society there is a centre and a periphery, there is no community. When there is lack of mutual trust, there is no community. Rejection leads to isolation and isolation breeds hate and violence. Alienation or marginalization leads to radicalization. Community means full participation; it means inter-connectedness and inter-dependence, underpinned by mutual understanding and trust.

Religion protects identity and promotes security. In situations where identity is threatened and participation denied, religious loyalties are enforced. Such situations develop insecurity, isolation and hate. Hence, full and active participation of all members of a society, irrespective of their colour or religion, in all aspects of society life, including decision-making, must be ensured. Where there is participation, values interact and identities are integrated to build a community of reconciled diversities.

c) By moving from reaction to interaction

Religions used to define and protect themselves by reacting to the other. The interdependent world imposes new paradigms, new criteria of self-understanding. Indeed, a genuine self-understanding implies engaging in creative dialogue with the other, and moving from a self-centred to an interactive self-understanding. Identity based on exclusive claims threatens the other and generates alienation. Identity defined exclusively in religious terms becomes a source of tension. Openness, dialogue and interaction do not create vulnerability; rather, they test the credibility and relevance of identity, and help community building.

We must create open spaces where dynamic interaction may take place. Creative interaction of perspectives, concerns and expectations will undoubtedly challenge and help us to move towards building a common life together on solid ground. We must endeavour together with our Muslim neighbours to consolidate our commonalities, which ensure wholeness and integrity, and we must preserve our diversities, which enrich community.

Concluding remarks

The ecumenical movement has always emphasized the "urgency" of dialogue.⁴³ The present world, in which walls are destroyed, distances are reduced and the other has become neighbour, has created a new quality and form of dialogue: dialogue of life. We are all engaged, in one way or another, in dialogue of life. The ecumenical movement has also emphasized the "uniqueness" of Christian-Muslim dialogue. This is true for historical, theological and geo-political reasons. Wrestling with ontological and metaphysical questions is not a priority for Christian-Muslim dialogue. In a world marked by confrontation and polarization, the top and urgent priority is how we should live together as a community.

⁴³ *Striving Together in Dialogue: A Muslim-Christian Call to Reflection and Action*, Geneva, 2001, pp. 2, 13.

We should not impose our values on each other; we must strengthen our common values, respect our differences and together strive for a common life in community. Unrealistic expectations and aggressive reactions, disrespectful attitudes and arrogant behaviour will only produce alienation and distrust. Learning from each other and sharing our concerns will help us to grow together towards a harmonious life together.⁴⁴

In my response to the Islamic letter of "A Common Word between Us and You", I said: "Relationship, reciprocity and accountability build community. Sharing life together implies building community. Human beings cannot live without community. As an expression of love towards God and towards neighbour, community building has been central to both Muslim and Christian teachings and ways of life. We firmly believe, as we have stated on different occasions in ecumenical meetings, that a strong commitment to living together would help us to destroy the walls of prejudice, reassert that each religion has integrity, and generate mutual accountability and common responsibility". I believe that "we must accept and respect the way we are, by suspending our desire to emphasize differences and committing ourselves to becoming communities of living together with the fear of God and not with the fear of one another".⁴⁵

In conclusion, I want to make a few suggestions for the future work of WCC.

1. Religious plurality and Christian self-understanding must remain a major item on the agenda of the ecumenical movement. Issues related to this area need to be tackled with interdisciplinary in approach and holistic in perspective. Insights and experiences gained through the studies of "Gospel and Culture" and "Christian Anthropology" must be taken into consideration in this process.
2. The ecumenical movement has a rich history of Christian-Muslim dialogue. A critical evaluation of the Christian-Muslim common journey is imperative at this time, as we seek new ways of living and working together in a new world context.
3. The agenda of Christian-Muslim dialogue must be more focused, touching issues that pertain to the life of people. The concepts of "broader community" and "holistic mission", as well as "global ethics" based on shared values are critical areas which require deeper scrutiny and further discussion. In this context we must make us of the rich debate that Faith and Order and CWME had in the last two decades.
4. Finally, the process that the WCC started with the Critical Moment Conference (2005) and the Christian-Muslim Conference (2002) must continue with renewed pace. As a global ecumenical fellowship, the World Council of Churches is called to play a leading

⁴⁴ The growing openness of the Muslim world towards West is, indeed, a positive step forward. In this context the initiatives taken by the Muslim countries of the Middle East and Asia must be warmly welcomed. In this regard I want to make three observations: 1) These initiatives need to be more organized in terms of agenda, methodology and representation. 2) They must not become one-time event but a continuous process with a clear focus and objective. 3) A particular attention need to be given to the churches in the Middle East because of their centuries of co-existence with Islam.

⁴⁵ <http://www.acommonword.com>

role in Christian-Muslim dialogue, engaging in working relationship with Muslim Centres and Institutions, which enjoy a high degree of representation.

- **Signing of the statement “Faith in Human Rights” by WCC general secretary at the international interreligious conference on Faith in Human Rights on the occasion of the 60th anniversary of the UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights, The Hague, Netherlands, 10 December 2008**

By adding my signature to this Statement I affirm the basic values and principles inherent in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights even as I reiterate that human rights are a matter of faith.

1. The adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) in the aftermath of the Second World War was a decisive milestone with regard to the protection and promotion of human dignity, human rights and fundamental freedoms. This Declaration finds its roots in the strong desire for peace of the Member States of the United Nations, and has been commonly adopted despite their differences in ideologies, political systems, religious and cultural backgrounds.
2. In its Preamble, the Declaration starts by recognizing that the "inherent dignity of all members of the human family is the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world" and links human dignity to the recognition of fundamental rights towards which every human being aspires: the right to life, liberty and security of individuals; the right to seek and to enjoy in other countries asylum from persecution; the right to freedom of opinion and expression; the right to freedom from torture and degrading treatment; etc. to name only a few. Sixty years after its adoption, the Declaration still remains the Magna Carta for all humanity and has created a benchmark for state conduct at national and international levels, and helps us realize our shared vision of a religiously and culturally diverse world community striving to promote and defend the rights and dignity of all.
3. The primary responsibility to promote and protect human rights belongs to States. In addition, States have duties to the wider communities to which they belong, and bear the responsibility to promote and proclaim the universality of human rights. Today, thousands of innocent people die, face hardship and are victims of ill-treatment due to mere violations of their basic human rights, thus making the enjoyment of basic human rights a mirage for many.
4. The Declaration is by no means a 'pick-and-choose' list: it is a document that should be accepted comprehensively. There is an urgent need for a thorough reflection on the acceptance of each right as an integral part of the whole. The rights, freedoms and obligations laid down in the Declaration are universal,

indivisible and interdependent and interrelated. Despite the national and regional particularities, as well as historical, cultural and religious backgrounds of many, arguments regarding the cultural relativity of human rights should not be encouraged. Rather, a dynamic interpretation of human rights should be welcomed, and ought to highlight States' duty in the promotion and protection of all human rights and fundamental freedoms.

5. In these times when many in the world are fascinated by violence and its various forms, we – religious leaders – should relentlessly promote peaceful means to redress and refrain from the use of violence. With regard to the increase in religious intolerance, and without denying the importance of the freedom of expression, special sensitivity and respect should be shown to the portrayal of objects of religious veneration.
6. As religious leaders, our role is to study carefully our respective holy scriptures and teachings so as to find grounds for theological rationale in defense of human rights. We need to address situations where harm has been done in the name of religion, promote forgiveness, reconciliation and healing in order to foster mutual respect and understanding among our communities, and stimulate interfaith co-operation with mutual respect.

In conclusion, I wish to underline the World Council of Churches' deep commitment to continue to uphold, promote and advocate for human rights and human dignity for all, and towards that end to seek cooperation with leaders of other faiths.

Samuel Kobia
General secretary
World Council of Churches

- **Joint communiqué on religion and peaceful co-existence issued by the WCC and the Centre for Interreligious Dialogue of the Islamic Culture and Relations Organization on the occasion of their fifth symposium, Tehran, Iran, 13-14 December 2008**

The World Council of Churches (WCC, Geneva, Switzerland) and Centre for Interreligious Dialogue of the Islamic Culture and Relations Organization (Tehran, Iran) held their fifth symposium in Tehran on 13-14 December 2008.

Representatives of Islam and Christianity found new points of commonality during a two-day high level symposium of scholars and spiritual leaders in Tehran, and discussed models of co-existence between Christians and Muslims in different contexts. They explored further the conditions and principles that foster peaceful coexistence between communities of faith.

The symposium, held at the invitation of the Organization of Islamic Culture and Relations in Iran, was a continuation of a dialogue between Iranian Muslim and Christian scholars related to the World Council of Churches (WCC) which began in 1995. Participants from the WCC included six Christian scholars from Europe, North America and the Middle East, together with representatives of the WCC member churches in Tehran. From Iran, participants included some fifteen scholars and religious leaders from Tehran and Qom.

During the two-day dialogue the symposium discussed issues related to the concept of salvation in relation to other religions, the religious understanding of human dignity, conversion, the status of religious minorities in different contexts, the common values and shared principles between religious communities, the role of education in promoting peaceful co-existence, the concept of cultural and religious identity, and the role of religion in the public space.

The dialogue reached agreement on the following points:

Co-existence between Christians and Muslims in Iran has its roots in the history and culture of Iranian society. In this context, both Islam and Christianity have the sources to provide the common ground for this coexistence.

Peace requires mutual understanding among the followers of different faiths. This entails learning about each other's faith, and dialogue can pave the way to achieving this objective.

Constructive dialogue between Christians and Muslims can build bridges of mutual respect based on clear understandings of one's own religion and the religion of the other.

Muslims and Christians share the Abrahamic tradition of faith, and therefore they share responsibility for promoting peaceful coexistence in their respective communities.

Peaceful coexistence between Christians and Muslims should be based on their equal participation and shared responsibility towards society and each other. This includes recognizing and respecting one another's religious and civil rights, and taking a common stand whenever the rights of religious communities are violated and whenever irresponsible media try to present a distorted image of any particular religion, offending its symbols and followers.

Preserving one's own religious and cultural identity should not be in contradiction to respecting the religious and cultural identity of the other. In each religion and culture we can discover the common fundamental principles for peace and respect. Dialogue between Christians and Muslims must promote these principles and obligations towards each other in order to strengthen the peaceful coexistence.

Through dialogue and cooperation Christians and Muslims can together discover their common principles and values, and renew their joint commitment to them.

The symposium agreed that the experience of dialogue should not be confined to the level of scholars and spiritual leaders, but should be brought into everyday life of believing communities, wherever they may be.

At the end of this symposium the organizers felt that it is important to deepen the dialogue in the time to come by academic research, exchange of concerns, and common projects. At the same time, all participants were encouraged to engage with their respective communities to correct prejudices and enhance mutual understanding.

- **Formation of a coalition of 45 religious, inter-faith and value-based organizations from around the globe to advance a “United Nations Decade for Interreligious and Intercultural Dialogue, Understanding and Cooperation for Peace”, New York, USA, 2-4 March 2009**

Faith and values organizations form coalition to advance United Nations Decade for Interreligious Cooperation for Peace

Some forty-five religious, interfaith, and value-based organizations from five continents agreed to form a coalition to advance a "United Nations Decade for Interreligious and Intercultural Dialogue, Understanding, and Cooperation for Peace." Coalition members expressed the hope that the UN Sixty-Fourth General Assembly, which will begin its deliberations in September 2009, will approve a resolution establishing such a decade from 2011-2020.

The meeting took place at Maryknoll, New York, on 2-4 March. Participants included Baha'i, Buddhist, Christian, Hindu, Jewish, Muslim, Shinto, Sikh, Zoroastrian as well as indigenous traditions.

A provisional steering committee promoted the decade with UN member states during 2008. The UN General Assembly took the first step on 14 November 2008 by adopting resolution 63/22 which calls for exploring the feasibility of such a decade. The resolution was co-sponsored by 78 states.

On Monday, the president of the UN General Assembly, Miguel D'Escoto Brockmann, reiterated his previous calls for a "new spirit of solidarity and a powerful injection of moral and ethical values into our business and political lives." He urged the religious leaders to work together with the United Nations since these concerns require "life-long commitment" and religious institutions have the "staying power in the face of these challenges."

The coalition elected a steering committee – composed of organizations representing religious communities, interfaith and value-based civil society organizations – to strategically promote the decade idea among member states of the UN.

An opportunity to work for peace

Stein Villumstad, deputy secretary general of **Religions for Peace**, the world's largest and most representative multi-religious organization, will chair the coalition steering committee. "This is a unique opportunity for religious traditions, so easily hijacked for destructive purposes, to work with the United Nations and jointly mobilize their communities and organizations for urgent and compelling actions for peace," he said. "Time and space created by the decade should make a difference for the poor, marginalized, and oppressed peoples of the world."

The World Council of Churches (WCC) – host of the initial gathering of this coalition in Bossey, Switzerland in January 2008 – continues to promote this initiative, said Shanta Premawardhana, WCC director for Interreligious Dialogue and Cooperation. "Our churches, through the Churches Commission on International Affairs (CCIA) have a long history of working with the UN and its agencies on a variety of projects that contribute to sustainable peace," he said.

The coalition will meet next in the context of the Parliament of the World's Religions in Melbourne, Australia, in December 2009. Dirk Ficca, the executive director of the Parliament, himself a member of the steering committee welcomed the initiative.

Coalition members hope the proposed UN decade will be launched on 21 September 2010, the International Day of Peace. This would immediately follow the current 2001-2010 International Decade for a Culture of Peace and Non-violence for the Children of the World and the 2010 International Year for the Rapprochement of Cultures.

- **Address by WCC general secretary at the Third Congress of Leaders of World and Traditional Religions: The role of religious leaders in building a peaceful society based on tolerance, mutual respect and cooperation, Astana, Kazakhstan, 1 July 2009**

1. Your Excellency, Nursultan Nazarbayev, the president of the Republic of Kazakhstan, your Eminences, Excellencies, distinguished delegates, I am honoured to be a part of this august gathering of religious leaders at the Third Congress of World and Traditional Religious Leaders and want to congratulate you on your successful efforts at bringing world religious leaders together once more.

2. At the outset, I wish to acknowledge that Kazakhstan has a distinguished history of being at the cross-roads of many cultures and religions. Today it is home to large Muslim and Christian communities as well as a rich variety of other religious communities, all desiring to worship and practice their faith in freedom and peace. As you well know, Your Excellency, while it is in the interest of the state that religions live harmoniously in a society, interreligious cooperation cannot be imposed by the state. Religious communities themselves must work with each other to discover effective ways of

dialogue and cooperation. Of course the state can encourage collaboration by creating the conditions that are conducive to such cooperation by assuring the opportunities for the free exercise of religion. You have helped this course as recently as March this year, by agreeing with your supreme court's determination that the restrictions that were proposed by a parliamentary bill were unconstitutional. I want to support your efforts in ensuring such freedom for all religious communities in Kazakhstan.

3. Your Excellency, it has been a well-established practice for religious leaders to call each other for dialogue. However, lately government leaders like you are calling us for interreligious dialogue. The idea that in order to establish Astana as a city of peace, its foundation must be interreligious dialogue is good and right. Our presence here as religious leaders signifies our support for that cause. As well this congress offers us the opportunity to engage in the important work of meeting and building relationships with each other to strengthen our joint work for peace.

4. I am grateful to be able to offer my reflections to this summit of distinguished religious leaders. The World Council of Churches, which I serve as general secretary is the world's premier Christian ecumenical organization. It has a membership of 349 churches across the world in the Protestant and Orthodox families of faith, and numbers some 560 million Christians. Every Sunday, these faithful people gather for worship in large urban centres and in small rural communities in countries across the world, including here in Kazakhstan. The gathering of millions of 'captive audience' every week provides the rarest of opportunities for spiritual and ethical formation.

5. One of the roles of religious leaders in building peace is that of convening; bringing others together to deliberate on concerted efforts in overcoming violence and resolving conflicts. Here I wish to share an example of how effective this convening role could be. In 2007, as part of its work on peace-making in the Middle East, the World Council of Churches called for a conference in Amman, Jordan. This was a unique opportunity where, for the first time churches from Jerusalem came together with one single voice, expecting costly solidarity from sister churches all over the world. The WCC could, because of its credibility among the different churches, call together diverse church leaders and representatives to address thorny and difficult issues. The wide spectrum of participation and representation in Amman was an encouraging example of ecumenical solidarity. It gave us the courage to keep hope and not despair vis-à-vis international politics. We learnt that churches together in solidarity can make a change.

6. The Amman call continues to have an impact in many parts of the world. Last month in San Anselmo, California, U.S.A., Christians, Muslims and Jews involved in supporting Palestinian-Israel peace process invited WCC to speak about the Amman experience. In a couple of public speaking engagements I shared about the Amman experience with scholars, activists, religious community leaders whose common course is to contribute to peace in Israel-Palestine. The inspiration drawn from our discourses was that hope grounded in true change can emerge, and from it just peace when people of different faiths in the USA engage their leaders and call on them to implement a peace rooted in justice and respect for the aspirations of both Palestinians and Israelis.

7. Religious leaders can also assist in building a peaceful society by being a living model of dialogue and cooperation. In such opportunities as this one, we come to meet, talk, build and renew relationships with each other. This sends a powerful message to our constituencies as we show that it is theologically proper and in keeping with our religious traditions to meet with other religious persons for dialogue and cooperation. Track II diplomacy is the "unofficial, informal interaction between members of adversary groups or nations that aim to develop strategies, influence public opinion, and organize human and material resources in ways that might help resolve conflicts." This cooperation among religious leaders gives us the opportunity to engage and share experiences in faith-based diplomacy as a contribution to Track II conflict resolution. In this way we can think together about creative alternatives to what Track I is able to produce.

8. Any encounter's success depends on the participants' getting to know each other which in turn leads to breaking down psychological barriers and stereotypes. This humanizes "the other", provides an opportunity to demythologize the narratives about the past and evaluate threat-perceptions. Indeed, facing "the other" can help each of us to recognize that the one who may seem at first like an adversary may actually share many of the same fears and constraints, and similar experiences.

9. Recently there have been many attempts, both by governments and religious leaders to create opportunities for this kind of conversation. The WCC's programme on interreligious Dialogue and Cooperation itself has done substantial work to prepare our churches to engage with other religious communities. Even as the WCC's goal is to foster visible unity among the churches, these efforts need to be commended to our churches and religious communities.

10. I remain convinced, however, that the real action is not at this table, but at the ground where churches, mosques, synagogues, temples, gurudwaras and communities that gather in other houses of worship not only build relationships for cooperation, but engage with each other in real action that leads to peace and reconciliation. We hear many stories where joint action by churches, mosques, synagogues and temples helps to change local public policy towards social justice, to create programs that alleviate hunger and help the homeless, to provide new initiatives for health and education and to stand in solidarity with each other when one community is threatened. Dialogue that arises out of situations of tension – when we learn to appreciate the tension and manage it properly – lead to effective cooperative action.

11. It is still necessary and important that religious leaders and scholars gather for interfaith dialogue. But let us recognize that too often, we are the very ones who stand in the way of grassroots communities organizing for peace. Sometimes the theologies, the doctrinal traditions, our religious practices, our bureaucracies, keep our people from doing the right thing – engaging in dialogue, cooperating in common action, organizing for peace. Our coming together must find ways of releasing, supporting and energizing grassroots and community initiatives for peace and reconciliation.

12. The third role is that of providing opportunities for the younger generation both to learn from us, religious leaders, as well as to challenge us. Many of us who are here as religious leaders are considered the "older generation" by those in our constituencies. The younger people of today are not as burdened as we are with the differences they see in the other. In a more globalized society and in communities which are much more pluralistic than when we grew up, they are getting to know people from different religions already from a young age. Just as they have been taught by us, we must also learn from them. As religious leaders we must give them the opportunities that we did not have to work with and enter into dialogue with those in other faiths.

13. Your Excellency, allow me to share a concrete example from our experience. For several years now the World Council of Churches, in conjunction with Muslim and Jewish partners, has provided such a chance for younger people in our one-month-long programme entitled Building an Interfaith Community. The course is open to younger people with the goal of learning about each other and challenging and overcoming stereotypes. While fully respecting and affirming each particular faith identity, the course focuses on what we, as people of faith, do to respond and to overcome the pressing challenges of our time and build together a mutually accountable society based on respect and cooperation. The programme integrates spiritual exposure and sharing, the study of the sacred scriptures from each tradition and lectures and workshops given by specialists from Christian, Jewish and Muslim communities.

14. The WCC staff person who is responsible for youth often says "youth are not the future, they are the present!" These younger people in our congregations and in our communities are particularly skilled in networking. Because of the internet they are able to make friends, to work on projects with others and share their concerns – including peace-making – with people all over the world. In all our traditions, the younger people of today are uniquely placed to facilitate links between very different kinds of people in a way that we never could. As religious leaders our role in building peaceful societies necessitates encouraging our younger people to understand people of other faiths that can lead to mutual respect with the other that can help prevent intolerance and conflict.

15. With the privilege of leading our communities also comes responsibility, not only to our own constituencies but to all. By bringing people together around building peace and tolerance, we make more progress than by going alone. By providing living examples to our communities through intentional interaction with those of other traditions we build mutual respect as a forerunner of peace building. By encouraging our people and being open to what they have to offer in terms of concrete gifts and action each context, we as religious leaders can contribute to building peace and cooperation. Given time and more creative work we can provide the opportunity for interfaith dialogue to emerge as a key ingredient to make a difference in transforming our societies and our world.

- **Minute on the responsibility of churches for communities enduring anti-Christian violence adopted by WCC central committee, 26 August–2 September, Geneva, Switzerland 2009**

1. Christian communities in many parts of the world today are the targets of different forms of religiously motivated violence or find themselves under threat and intimidation. In many cases exacerbated by ethnic conflict and frequently in the midst of war and even following in times of peace, these Christians often find their governments unable or unwilling to fulfil their responsibility to protect. We have noted a decline of religious freedom in many parts of the world and an increase of religious intolerance. Acknowledging the responsibility of each part of the Body of Christ for the whole Body and remembering the New Testament call to “weep with those who weep” (Romans 12:15), to “contribute to the needs of the saints” (Romans 12:13), and “to bear one another’s burdens, and in this way you will fulfil the law of Christ” (Galatians 6:2), the central committee of the World Council of Churches (WCC), meeting in Geneva, Switzerland, 26 August – 2 September 2009:
 - A. **Challenges** its member churches to hear the cries of sisters and brothers in Christ enduring violence, threat and intimidation throughout the world and to give voice to their suffering so that their pain will not be ignored; pray without ceasing for an end to violence and a restoration of life; engage in acts of costly solidarity such as pastoral visits, generous sharing of financial resources, sending letters of support and consolation and, when possible, offering hospitality and sanctuary to those who are forced to become refugees while at the same time helping to facilitate their repatriation.
 - B. **Asks** its member churches to engage in public witness challenging their own and, when appropriate, other governments to protect the lives of citizens in accordance with international standards of human rights.
 - C. **Lifts up** the programme “Accompanying Churches in Situations of Conflict” and **calls upon** the general secretary and officers of the WCC to stand in the forefront of the witness for religious freedom, monitoring situations of violence and alerting its member churches, facilitating ecumenical responses, organizing ecumenical visits of solidarity, and addressing governments and international organizations calling on them to protect those who are vulnerable.
 - D. **Requests** the Commission of the Churches on International Affairs to develop policy and proposals for supporting religious freedom in multi-faith contexts and effectively engaging the churches in the defence of Christians experiencing violence.
 - E. **Encourages** churches in all contexts to demonstrate interfaith sensitivity in their witness, by preaching and teaching against retaliation, honouring the right to religious freedom for all.
 - F. **Reminds** the churches that their witness against anti-Christian violence is made more credible when it is matched by a clear commitment to protect all vulnerable persons and communities regardless of their religious identity.

Discrimination/Racism

- **Statement from the delegates of the ecumenical conference "Abolished, but Not Destroyed: Remembering the Slave Trade in the 21st Century", December 2007**

The 200th anniversary of the formal abolition of the British Transatlantic Trade in Africans in 2007 is a significant historical marker. We – the delegates from the World Council of Churches, the World Alliance of Reformed Church, and the Council for World Mission – gathered in Jamaica in December 2007 around the commemoration of this anniversary as representatives of the global ecumenical community. Gathered from Africa, the Caribbean, and the Americas, we are people representing churches and grassroots initiatives, and we assembled to analyze, and make recommendations around modern forms of slavery and the continued legacy of the Transatlantic Trade in Africans in the 21st century.

Between the 16th and 19th century, an estimated 15 million enslaved African peoples were forcibly taken from Africa, shipped across the Atlantic Ocean and landed in the Caribbean and the Americas. This horrific voyage was named the Middle Passage; and over these hundreds of years, an additional 40% of enslaved people who left Africa died en route. This Transatlantic Trade in Africans particularly profited England, Portugal, France, Spain, and Holland. An integral component of the European-American world's economy, the Transatlantic Trade in Africans powerfully linked together Africa, Europe, the Caribbean, and the Americas.

Many churches were actively involved in the Transatlantic Trade in Africans and colonialism; hence, the church's mission has been seriously compromised and betrayed by its historic complicity with two of the most blatant forms of oppression that occurred within the 16th to 19th century. Further, the church's pastoral and prophetic roles in the contemporary period are obstructed by its voluntary amnesia about its past corporate sin and silence regarding the past – as well as regarding the present – responsibility to bring justice to those still suffering from the legacy of the Transatlantic Trade in Africans and cultural imperialism. While there have been some acts of repentance and confessional statements made by some churches, for the most part, those statements have not been effective enough in eradicating White supremacy, systemic racism and the ongoing legacy of the Transatlantic Trade in Africans.

We recognize that there were faithful members among churches and in society who worked alongside those who were enslaved, to ameliorate the conditions of enslaved peoples, and who continued the struggle to abolish the slave trade and gain freedom for enslaved peoples. Their witness should inspire us today for renewed action and faithful resistance against exploitative powers.

We also realize, however, that people of White European ancestry, whether they were anti- or pro-slavery, benefited from the entitlements accruing to them by virtue of being White-skinned peoples. For example, in late 1800s, in Brazil and many other colonies, although Black peoples were being emancipated from legal slavery, they were not given land, and had to pay high rent for tools and other resources; at the same time, White European immigrants were given incentives such as land and other resources. Thus, people of White European ancestry who had no direct involvement in the slavery or the slave trade became never-the-less beneficiaries of the enslavement system. Much has been written today about White privilege; this privilege is one of the legacies of the ideology of racial superiority that infused the Transatlantic Trade in Africans.

However, we, the descendants of this legacy of racism, are not without memory, voice, cultural resources, religious resources, and spiritual gifts prerequisite for helping the church address its current predicament. What our memories, voices, cultural expressions, and spiritual groans signify and articulate are the cries of the oppressed. If these cries are heeded by the church, both in its universal and local expressions, it will be better able to participate in the saving of the "*oikumene*".¹ If our voices are heard, then, the church might be better able to realize true community in identifying with the oppressed through the cross of Jesus Christ, and the church might be better able to live out an action-reflection model by verily assuming the form of the enslaved.

With this in mind, we name several dimensions of the current struggle, and make recommendations for the future.

Theological Dimensions:

The Bible, as sacred text, is a key source for people of faith. But there are also several sources of theological reflection are embedded in the cultures, communities and individual lives of oppressed people. We believe that as people of faith, we need to recognize that God's creation, God's care, and God's presence encompass all of creation, and that this reality calls people of faith to a theology and engagement that cooperates with people of all religions and spiritualities who work for justice in the world.

We also believe that as people of faith, we need to engage heart, soul, mind, and strength in critically analyzing the historical context of the Bible as well as the text of our cultures, communities, and individual lives. As people of faith, we need to create support systems of teaching and learning for those with hardened hearts who reject the church's culpability and complicity in the Transatlantic Trade in Africans and colonialism. We believe that churches that were complicit in the slave trade need to name that the Transatlantic Trade in Africans – and other modern forms of slavery – are sin. And, as people of faith, we need to speak a new language which reflects the insights of God with all, and that fosters relationships which express the values of the reign of God, in which the lion and lamb live together.

Prophetic Issues and Action-Reflection Models:

We believe that reparations are essential for the healing of peoples who were once enslaved. Reparations go far beyond a financial figure; rather, reparations are about recognizing the wrong that has been done. It is a process that compels confession, contrition, restoration and reconciliation; it also involves a process or truth-telling that

sets rights, makes amends and restores breached relationships. Reparations from both the church and society are needed, and these reparations are both praxis and prophetic – naming the wrongs that have been done is praxis or an action-reflection model; righting the wrongs, is a prophetic action.

The process of reparations requires the restoration of relationships that affirm the dignity and humanity of all parties in order to repair what has been broken. Reparations also challenge the perpetrator to confession and repentance and ministers restoration and healing to those who have been exploited.

The Transatlantic Trade in Africans destroyed the roots of nation-building and enriched the oppressors to build its nations and states. Thus, we believe that mere financial aid is no replacement; rather, full nationhood and community restoration of peoples impacted should be the condition of reparations. In today's global context, a lingering effect of the Transatlantic Trade in Africans and colonialism has been the displacement of millions of people. Thus, reparations and immigration in a global context means dismantling communities of refugees, claiming and reclaiming the rights to movement of people regionally and inter-regionally without insults and suspicions. This includes the millions who are forced off their homelands to those who are internally displaced within their homeland in many places in the world.

We also recognize that oppression continues to operate in India through the caste system, a system whose origin precedes European colonization. The caste system may serve as a model for understanding the effects of slavery and colonialism in Europe and America. The fight, therefore, against racism can be linked to the Dalit struggle against the caste system. This parallel allows people of the African Diaspora and Dalit communities to be in solidarity with one another.

The reality of human trafficking, child labour, child soldiers, enslaved labour in the Amazon, and others, are modern forms of slavery that too need to be addressed. A strong solidarity system needs to be put into place so that concerted social pressure continues to be exerted against those structures which sustain the injustices.

We believe that in considering communities that have been marginalized, it is essential to avoid embracing a hierarchy of oppression, but instead to consider ways in which people's forms of oppression are interrelated; we cannot privilege one form of oppression over another. We need to stop reinventing the wheel of imitating the oppressors, or that of oppressive models. We must create alternative models of deconstructing oppression in relation to caste, race, gender, ethnicity, and other identifiers of marginalization. Enslaved peoples need to break into the entire hegemonic² power system, and disrupt it. In order to do this, we need a critical critique of the logic and assumptions, spoken and unspoken, that under gird this entire hegemonic power system. Enslaved peoples will no doubt continue to participate in this work.

We also recognize that all peoples have been impacted by the Transatlantic Trade in Africans and colonialism. Collectively, therefore, we need to destroy the power and institutional relationships of contemporary beneficiaries³ of the historic and corporate sin and crimes against humanity. Thus, the descendants of the buyers of the enslaved also need to be actively engaged in this process of deconstruction and reconciliation, and in

the process of reparation and the restoration of relationships. We believe that there needs to be a process of mutual education; the need to research more, to write, speak, share and tell our stories.

We maintain that it is essential to kill the root of what is sustaining the power structure. A triangular approach is needed, which includes people from Africa, people in the Diaspora, and the descendants of those who benefited from the institutional relationships of the Transatlantic Trade in Africans and colonialism. Among those who have benefited, includes the structures and assets of many churches. Many churches could not offer a prophetic voice at the time of the Transatlantic Trade in Africans because they were eating at the table of the hegemonic power. Many churches instituted, participated in, sanctioned and sustained the system, the enslavers and the buyers. Today, therefore, the church needs to offer a prophetic voice, and rather than be reactive, needs to be proactive.

We also believe that we need an organic, holistic approach to contend with the legacies of colonialism and of the Transatlantic Trade in Africans. The concept of *ubuntu*⁴ may offer theological and sociological principles around which to move forward.

Cultural Sites of Memories:

*Balm Yaad*⁵ sessions, and other cultural rituals, are important parts of religio-cultural expressions and strategies for healing in community settings. In addition, we believe that we must continue to write and creatively express our own stories and say who we are to start the process of healing and extend it to others, individuals, churches, and communities. Storytelling, iconic and creative expressions are critically important in the process of healing; therefore, the production of knowledge created through our lived stories must be part and parcel of sites of memories.

The church must also involve itself in the struggle of people who live new forms of enslavement, including human trafficking. We believe that open spaces must be set up and existing events such as and World Social Forums, the Zanzibar International Festival of Dhow (ZIFF), and many others should be used to create awareness and compel changes. These types of strategies would assist in healing stigmatized identities of marginalized peoples.

Theories of the Social Construction of Knowledge:

We have been asking the question where does knowledge come from, and how do we know what we know? We believe that if we are not questioning what we know, and how we know it, then we remain captives of dominant frameworks of knowing.

We believe that the Transatlantic Trade in Africans, and colonialism, call into question all systems and institutions, their structures, their constructions of knowledge, and the ways these constructions of knowledge function to endorse notions of hierarchies of rights and unjust practices. Some of these practices are grounded in understandings that are contrary to human dignity and the integrity of God's creation. The legacies of the Transatlantic Trade in Africans and colonialism also call into question all norms and conventions that implicitly and explicitly put in dispute the understanding of the centrality of the image of God in all human beings.

Two areas of human relations that exemplify these inequitable realities are race and gender. The basis of the social construction of race and gender must be challenged with regards to the interests they serve and for the purpose of discovering and disrupting the logic that govern the ways in which they were constructed by human beings. We must recognize how specific identities, including race and gender, function in overlapping ways to prevent human beings from experiencing life in its fullness. We must engage in gender and race analyses that approach oppression from the perspective of its interlocking, intersecting, and interrelated nature, so that we may recognize the ongoing multi-level construction and reconstruction processes that are involved, and the implications that they bear for economic justice. This process is absolutely necessary to provide appropriate frameworks from which we strategize for justice.

Oppression operates not only through physical force and coercion, but also at the discursive level of language where the ways in which knowledge is constructed, and the ways in which we use language to describe reality and human relations show elements of oppression. Since the Transatlantic Trade in Africans and colonialism were such essential components in the emergence of modernity, it, in turn, produced many categories related to notions of being human, the creation, and God that are often taken for granted. There is power in naming – and re-naming – ourselves, our situations, and our relationships. It is essential, therefore, that we examine and critique the categories we use to define ourselves in relationship to other human beings and God. When we do not examine and critique our human-created categories, we remain enslaved to the old framework, and fail to fully appreciate how the system of oppression functions in its totality.

Pastoral Dimensions:

The church is being urged to re-assess its pastoral role. This role is derived from Matthew 22:36-39, in which Jesus explained that humanity's greatest duty is to love God and love thy neighbour as thyself. In a historical and current context of patriarchy, which entrenches hierarchies of caste, class, gender, ethnicity, and age, the local church is urged to make use of relevant rituals, including those inspired by indigenous religions and spiritualities towards the process of healing, restoration and reconciliation.

We believe that the process of healing, restoration and reconciliation must be built on a naming of sin and the claiming of salvation. Salvation encompasses the wholeness of life and the wholeness of humanity in all of its dimensions, and in the context of community. The issues of shame and fear, resistance and compliance, on the part of descendants of the enslaved and the enslavers must be central to the process of healing. Pastorally speaking, therefore, the church cannot make assumptions around the knowledge and conscientiousness of people based on age. Many young people who are descendants of the enslaved, for example, are already actively engaged in learning about their histories, resisting oppression, and striving to create alternatives to hegemonic powers. The church must create welcoming environments for the youth and young adults, and at the same time must seek to remove barriers of caste, class, ethnicity and insularity, which effectively exclude others.

Recommendations and affirmations:

As representatives of the global ecumenical community, we, therefore, offer the following recommendations and affirmations as those who are numbered within the church and also among the descendants of the enslaved.

We the delegates of the ecumenical conference "Abolished, but Not Destroyed" commit ourselves to:

- start a list of resources and recommended readings about the Transatlantic Trade in Africans, and its ongoing legacy. This recommended list is one step towards sharing stories and knowledge, and this list of information could be made available on ecumenical websites, including the World Council of Churches, the Council on World Mission, and the World Alliance of Reformed Churches;
- create a variety of media (including CDs of papers from the conference) to give to congregations for reflection, discussion, and action;
- publish and share religio-cultural rituals, create and have rites of passages, link to women's international sites of memory, and also publish those rituals and sites for others to access;
- continue to question our sources of knowledge (including bibliographies), and strive to address our knowledge gaps through continual learning and analysis;
- share our collective resources within the global ecumenical community, including but not limited to sharing a statement and offering input into 2010 mission conference in Edinburgh; this input might include bringing discourses and analysis on racism, slavery, and patriarchy to this meeting;
- rewrite history at the grassroots level and from the perspective of those who were enslaved and marginalized, and continue to do intergenerational storytelling;
- maintain a system of communication among ourselves, and others who strive to become engaged in this work.

We recommend to the World Council of Churches, the World Alliance of Reformed Churches, and the Council for World Mission that:

- a comprehensive and exhaustive history of the role of the oppressive theological ideations and actual church systems towards the implementation, sustainability, and expansion of the Transatlantic Trade in Africans be developed and institutionalized. Special effort should be made to ensure that such an undertaking is pursued from an African worldview;
- to hear today's cries of oppression, and to respond to these cries, the global ecumenical church community should encourage and support the local churches and clusters of churches in collecting stories of oppression and resistance, and publish those stories;
- an ecumenical youth initiative focused on the legacy of the Transatlantic Trade in Africans takes place, and that young people's authentic participation be affirmed. Further, that a comprehensive media strategy must be part of the ecumenical

youth project so that the initiative not only affects those who go, but also those at home;

- opportunities are created and enabled for interfaith and interreligious dialogue, and work in solidarity with African indigenous religious;
- a process is created to examine the tools of empire, and how these tools are used;
- resources are created for churches on how to identify and challenge institutional racism, and that intentional racial justice analysis is built into church and ecumenical processes (such as AGAPE, Accra confession, millennium development goals, etc).

We recommend to governments that:

- financial and human resources be identified and made available, in trust and otherwise, with appropriate church, community, and academic entities to effect institutional development and remedies from the transatlantic slave trade system and colonialism at the local, national and global levels;
- support is offered to masters levels and doctoral levels research centers of excellence related to the Transatlantic Trade in Africans;
- reparations are offered for the healing of peoples who were once enslaved.

We recommend to congregations and people of faith that:

- new educational programs are created that build upon the best of the past, that produces pastors for communities whose folks are crying, and that intentionally address community problems;
- churches to take on creative projects, for example, young people interviewing elders in communities to learn and write down stories;
- resources are actively used in churches on that identify and challenge systemic and institutional racism, that a race analysis is built into church and ecumenical processes, and that churches teach those of privilege on how to divert privilege in the realm of Jesus and justice;
- the church take seriously the social construction of knowledge and identities, and social location in its reading and understanding of scriptures;
- churches be engaged in identifying historical sites of memory, and creating new sites of memory;
- in recognition of the power of naming, and re-naming, that the church divest of language which can be disempowering;
- churches that operate camps for children to develop creative curriculum to teach the history of the people, teach traditional songs, meet leaders from the community. This inclusive curriculum should be both interdisciplinary and intergenerational. Further, any curriculum that is used should embrace the fullness of the *imago dei*;
- churches continue to be in solidarity with Dalit peoples, and other marginalized and oppressed peoples around the world;

- reparations are offered for the healing of peoples who were once enslaved;
- as the church has stated that its mission was and is to spread the Gospel and teachings of Jesus Christ, the people of the church now request that the church speak truth to power by informing and supporting educational initiatives, at many levels, on the systemic impact of enslavement upon the lives of African-descendant peoples and communities throughout the world.

1 *Oikumene* is a term that refers to the whole, inhabited earth.

2 Hegemony is all encompassing; it is focuses with overarching issues of dominance and control. It also names the totality of interconnected systems of power and oppression.

3 Today's unequal flow of the world's goods and resources is due, in part to, the legacies of colonialism and slavery. Some economies were built through slave labour, and colonial exploitation of human and national resources. These legacies have benefited some and disadvantaged others over the centuries. The long-lasting impact of these legacies is made to appear natural through unspoken entitlements based race, class, gender, and other inequities, but in reality is unnatural and based on socially constructed ideologies of superiority.

4 *Ubuntu* is an expression of human relations lived in community and in harmony with the whole of creation ('African anthropology and cosmo-vision lived in community'). *Ubuntu* a possibility of reflecting, analyzing and protecting life based on the *Ubuntu* principle "I am because you are, you are because I am." Both these principles are about the eradication of hate, anger, private wealth without sharing, oppression, exploitation as well as harmony and peace with the cosmos.

5 *Balm Yaad* is a place for healing, reading and 'science', where persons who consider themselves ill, hurt, or in need of spiritual aid would seek the services of a 'Madda' or a 'science' man; a revivalist, who discerns the ailment and prescribes cures. A *Balm Yaad* can apply Christian principles, with distinctive blends of the folk tradition.

- **Joint written statement made at the United Nations Human Rights Council's seventh session against the issue of caste-based discrimination, 25 February 2008**

**Caste-based discrimination and analogous forms of inherited social exclusion:
Discrimination based on work and descent⁴⁶**

The former Commission on Human Rights, in its resolution 2005/109, gave a mandate to the former Sub-Commission on the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights to undertake a study on discrimination based on work and descent, and to develop draft principles and guidelines for the elimination of this form of discrimination. This was the

⁴⁶ International Dalit Solidarity Network (IDSN); National Campaign for Dalit Human Rights (NCDHR), India; Navsarjan, India; People's Watch Tamil Nadu, India; CasteWatchUK; Center for Human Rights and Global Justice, NYU School of Law; Dalit Network Netherlands (DNN); Dalit Solidarity Network, United Kingdom (DSNUK); and Justice and Peace Netherlands also share the views expressed in this statement.

first occasion on which the UN's leading human rights body sought to address comprehensively the entrenched form of discrimination that affects, among others, the Dalits of South Asia, estimated to number more than 200 million people.

Three years later, the Sub-Commission experts entrusted with this mandate, Professor Yozo Yokota and Professor Chin-Sung Chung, have completed their task and sought to deliver a final report which includes the draft principles and guidelines widely anticipated by organizations representing affected communities around the world. However, with the abolition of the Sub-Commission, their painstaking work lacks a forum for its consideration and finalization, and has become caught in a transitional limbo. This situation points to a lacuna in the institution-building process in the Human Rights Council – the lack of clear transitional arrangements for the pending work of the Sub-Commission.

One of the key criteria for judging the success of the reform of the UN's human rights architecture must surely be that the achievements of the Commission on Human Rights in promoting and protecting the human rights of the victims of violations around the world should at least not be undermined or neglected. But here is a clear case in which an entrenched system of discrimination which has led and continues to lead to some of the most egregious violations of the rights and freedoms of a significant proportion of humanity – and which the international human rights system has for far too long failed to propose a systemic response – risks being overlooked again.

Accordingly, the co-sponsors of this statement urge the creation of an appropriate procedure for the consideration and adoption of the final report submitted by Professors Yokota and Chung regarding discrimination based on work and descent, and for appropriate action on the draft principles and guidelines included in that report.

Making caste-based discrimination a priority on the agenda of the Human Rights Council as a serious contemporary human rights issue in Asia and the other parts of the world in which affected communities are found is an essential step for the realization of human rights for millions upon millions of the Earth's most vulnerable and marginalized people. We are somewhat encouraged that the focus areas for the Asia-Pacific region outlined in the OHCHR's Strategic Management Plan 2008-2009 are impunity, weak institutions and discrimination, all of which are key factors in contributing to the systematic discrimination against Dalits. More specifically, caste-based discrimination is mentioned as a specific human rights concern to be included in the OHCHR's field of work in the next biennium.

The continuing salience of caste-based discrimination is well-attested to by a growing chorus of concluding observations and recommendations issued by multiple treaty bodies concerning affected countries, as well as by material submitted for the forthcoming examinations of several affected countries under the UPR mechanism.

The Human Rights Council has, appropriately, a special focus on implementation, and on improving the situation of the victims of human rights violations on the ground. The draft

principles and guidelines developed by Professors Yokota and Chung can be a very important tool for fulfilling this responsibility to the more than 200 million people who still continue to struggle under crushing yoke of caste-based discrimination and analogous forms of inherited social exclusion. We call upon the Human Rights Council to take up this tool, and use it.

- **Joint oral statement regarding caste-based discrimination made at the United Nations Human Rights Council's eighth session on the consideration of the Universal Periodic Review Report of India, 10 June 2008**

Joint statement on behalf of the International Movement against Discrimination and All Forms of Racism (IMADR), the Lutheran World Federation (LWF), Pax Romana and the World Council of Churches.

Mr President,

We are pleased to note recommendations by a number of states in the report which is the outcome of India's Universal Periodic Review, which address the issue of caste based discrimination. In particular we note the recommendations made by Italy, Luxembourg, Canada and Belgium at sub-paragraphs 5 and 13 of paragraph 86. We were also encouraged to hear more than ten states raise specific questions or recommendations concerning caste-based discrimination during the review, as reflected in Part B of the report. This was a strong message to the Government of India that the international community is deeply concerned about the persistence of this form of discrimination which affects more than 167 million Dalits daily.

In its written responses to the abovementioned recommendations, the Indian delegation indicates that extensive disaggregated data, including on caste, are available in the public domain. We note however that this data does not adequately meet the requests of the CESCR Committee for the provision of annual data disaggregated by sex, age, caste, ethnicity, religion and region, something reiterated by the Committee in its Concluding Observations adopted on 16 May 2008 (paragraph 51, 58). In this regard, we welcome India's acceptance in its written response to the UPR, of Mexico's recommendation to take into account recommendations by treaty bodies and special procedures in developing its national action plan for human rights. We therefore look forward to seeing the following issues addressed in that action plan:

1. Measures to combat severe violations of Dalit rights in the areas of access to education, health, housing, and property, freedom of religion and free choice of employment, as recommended by the CESCR, CERD and CEDAW Committees;
2. The expansion and improvement of existing statistics on Scheduled Castes to include data on caste and related discrimination in accordance with recommendations made during its UPR, and also the recommendations of the CESCR Committee.

We also appeal to the Indian government to effectively utilise the UPR and follow-up to this review, by strengthening the human rights education initiatives mentioned by India in its written replies. This can be done by including human rights education in the school curricula as recommended by CESCR and focusing specifically in such initiatives on the need to effectively address gender and caste-based discrimination in accordance with Italy's recommendations. We also hope India will respond to the interest and concern expressed by members of the Council regarding caste based discrimination, by enforcing and effectively monitoring the implementation of its legal provisions at the domestic level to prevent atrocities against Dalits, and follow-up on existing recommendations issued by national human rights institutions.

We thank you, Mr President.

- **Address to the United Nations on the occasion of a WCC co-organized meeting on The Human Right to Peace and the Eradication of Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance, New York, USA, 27 March 2009**

First of all, I would like to thank Rochelle Roca-Hachem for her introduction and for UNESCO's collaboration in moderating this important discussion. Also a special word of thanks to the Spanish Society for International Human Rights Law and UNESCO Etxea for inviting the WCC to co-organize this meeting, at this key moment just prior to the Durban Review Conference in April. We are especially grateful to the Permanent Mission of Nicaragua and the office on the promotion of Peace and Human Rights of the regional government of Catalonia for their sponsorship of this Panel as well as the valuable support of the Federation of Associations for Defence and Promotion of Human Rights, the Colombian Commission of Jurists and the International Society for Human Rights.

My distinguished fellow-panelists have forcefully made the case for the urgency and necessity for the UN to promote the Human Right to Peace. The WCC has long pressed for addressing the interlinked systemic root causes of human rights violations. Without Peace and Justice there can be respect for Human Rights. And without respect for Human Rights there will be no Peace and Justice.

Today, therefore, we are focusing specially on the right to Peace as an integral tool to address the systemic social, political, ecological and economic injustice which characterizes the actual militarized and violent world social order and which is supported by and interconnected to racism, racial, religious, cultural and gender discrimination and violence.

The extreme poverty, ecological violence, destitution, exclusion and exploitation which afflicts the majority of the world's people for the benefit of the very few is scandalous and an offense to our most basic values of humanity, dignity and the inherent value of all life. Every human being is created in God's image and loved and valued by God. This

profound religious truth unites us to all people of Good will and the universal values of the protection and defence of our inalienable human rights and our concerted efforts for peace and against war – the founding vision and guiding principles of “We the Peoples” of the UN.

General Assembly President Miguel D’Escoto in a presentation to the executive committee of the WCC made it clear that faced with a series of intertwined crises threatening humanity and the earth, things could hardly be worse. The key, he reminds us is that at its core we are faced with a moral crisis – crisis of values a deficit in our love and care for each human life and for the life of the earth itself.

In addressing the scandalous situation confronting us and of which structural racism and racial discrimination is a sinful and evil part, we assert that JUSTICE must be at the core of our response. Here we strongly affirm the Luarca Declaration, in asserting the relationship between justice, peace and the eradication of racism, racial discrimination and xenophobia.

For emphasis I quote again, Para 17 of the Preamble of the Luarca Declaration:

“...the effectiveness of the right to peace will not be achieved without the realization of the equal rights for men and women and respect for their difference, without respect for the various cultural values and religious beliefs compatible with human rights, and without the eradication of racism, xenophobia and the contemporary forms of racial discrimination.”

The Ecumenical caucus statement read by Archbishop Desmond Tutu at the WCAR in Durban in 2001 states:

“Racism is a sin. It is contrary to God’s will for love, peace, equality, justice and compassion for all. It is an affront to human dignity and a gross violation of human rights...Racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerances all work, singularly and collectively, to diminish our common humanity. They thrive within the intersections of race, caste, colour, age, gender, sexual orientation, class, landlessness, ethnicity, nationality, language and disability. The dismantling of racism requires that we address all its manifestations and historical expressions, especially slavery and colonialism.”

For the global ecumenical community, addressing racism is an urgent question of transformative justice. It is imperative to overturn structures of exploitation and distorted power relations that destroy life and make a mockery of the human right to peace. Promoting dialogue, understanding, multiculturalism and respect is important but it must accompany the urgent need for structural and systemic change in the social, political, cultural, religious and economic structures that feed on and perpetuate unjust power relationships. From this perspective we see the deadly and oppressive link between racism and gender based discrimination and oppression.

On the eve of the Durban Review Conference, the WCC once again raises up a deep concern for caste based discrimination, which was not taken up in the WCAR and does not appear in the programme of action. The WCC together with the Lutheran World Federation and the Christian Conference of Asia has just finished holding a “Global Ecumenical Conference on Justice for Dalits,” in Bangkok, Thailand. This meeting was intentionally held just prior to the Durban Review Conference in order to draw international attention to this urgent issue, affecting 250 million persons, that the international community has so far failed to take up with sufficient seriousness. The call made to the WCAR in 2001 is still valid today and ask all States and NGOs to join in asking the DRC to recognize Dalits among victims of racial discrimination and for caste based discrimination to be included in the list of the sources of racism. Further mechanisms must be evolved by the UN, governments and civil society, to prohibit and redress discrimination on the basis of work and descent.

To add to the difficulties, people in situations of conflict often find themselves caught in a difficult dilemma as they struggle for peace and justice.

In many conflict situations there seems to be an externally imposed forced choice between Justice and Peace. We see this in places like Sudan and Uganda. If they follow the adversarial model of the International Criminal Court of holding leaders to account under the Rome Statutes, paradoxically this seems to threaten the peace processes which are based on negotiation and reconciliation.

From a religious and spiritual perspective we are clear that there is an inseparable relationship between, truth, justice, peace and reconciliation. The international community must promote the Human Right to Peace in a way that is guided by the spirit of restoring wholeness to communities shattered by violence and to building Peace with Justice fueled by truth and the healing of memories.

2009 has been declared the International Year of Reconciliation. As we promote the human right for peace and move to eradicate racism, we must make reconciliation between persons and peoples a fundamental part of the equation. This necessity is recognized in the resolution which established the International Year, and it must be part of our discussion. We are convinced that these elements of Truth, Justice and Reconciliation cannot be divorced, if true peace is to be achieved and if the scourge of war and violence is to be overcome, and if human dignity and the integrity of creation are to be upheld.

Reconciliation is both an ends and a means – it is a process and an objective. It requires the essential elements of respect, tolerance, compassion, empathy, dialogue, truth and it must be based on the restoration or creation of just relationships. The healing processes leading to peace requires dealing with restitution, restoration and reparation where possible. Quite frankly, without reconciliation based on restorative and transformative justice eradicating the root injustice of racism, sexism, class-ism and all the associated forms of oppression there will be no lasting peace. Reconciliation promotes and requires

the restoration of human dignity and worth and therefore goes hand in hand with justice, and is indispensable for peace.

Gathering up the combined visions that seek to address the urgent need for Peace and Justice based on respect for Human Rights and Human Dignity, there are many initiatives at this time geared at replacing war and violence with just relationships, equality, understanding respect and dialogue. Along with the crucial initiative for a Declaration on the Human Right to Peace, I would like to ask the support of all States and international civil society to support the initiative of a newly formed coalition to advance a “United Nations Decade for Interreligious and Intercultural Dialogue, Understanding and Cooperation for Peace.” Religious, interfaith and value-based organizations are joining together to promote a decade in the context of GA resolution 63/22 adopted on 14 November 2008, which calls for the member states to consider such a decade.

We see this as another contribution towards finding a common and facilitating framework to join forces to bring the values of dialogue, cooperation, understanding and respect together with transforming unjust structures and defending human dignity and life of the planet in fulfilment of our common striving for peace.

In conclusion, I draw our attention to Article 28 of the UDHR which reads: “Everyone is entitled to a social and international order in which the rights and freedoms set forth in this Declaration can be fully realized.” Therefore, if the human right to peace is to be fulfilled for all the people of this earth then, that absolutely demands the dismantling of systemic injustices and eradicating the sin and evil of racism, racial discrimination, caste-based discrimination, gender injustice, xenophobia and all related intolerance.

Let it be so.

- **Joint oral intervention by WCC and LWF at the United Nations' Durban Review Conference, Geneva, Switzerland, 24 April 2009**

Mr President,

Racism is a sin because it destroys the very source of humanity – the image of God in humankind. Racism desecrates God's likeness in every person.

The World Council of Churches and the Lutheran World Federation congratulate the Durban Review Conference on the successful adoption of the outcome document on Tuesday 21 April.

We welcome the fact that the conference was able to reaffirm the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action, and the international community's common commitment to

preventing, combating and eradicating racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance in all parts of the world, including those “under foreign occupation”.

We are grateful that the concept of ‘defamation of religions’ does not inappropriately intrude into the human rights framework of this document, which instead properly addresses itself to the stigmatization of “persons based on their religion or belief”.

We are also grateful for the support expressed for the work of the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination. We would, however, have welcomed further enhancement of CERD’s capacities, including through the establishment of an inquiry procedure. The observatory on all kinds of discrimination proposed by the High Commissioner for Human Rights may help compensate somewhat for the absence of such a procedure.

Mr President,

It is evident that a key objective of this conference and its preparatory process was to produce an outcome that could not reasonably cause offence. In that, the conference has certainly succeeded. But we wonder whether the victims of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance would judge that as a success.

We are satisfied that anti-Semitism and the Holocaust have been explicitly addressed in this document, along with a number of other groups and situations. We regret, however, that controversies over one single situation have so consumed the attention and energy of the Durban process, from 2001 until now.

We especially regret that, repeating the failure of the World Conference against Racism, the Durban Review Conference has failed to acknowledge the suffering of the more than 200 million people discriminated against on the basis of work and descent. The Dalits – formerly known as untouchables – are once again made invisible in this document. The World Council of Churches and the Lutheran World Federation jointly convened a conference in Bangkok exactly one month ago in which participants representing churches and church-related organizations from around the world expressed their solidarity with the Dalit struggle for justice. We are distressed, but not surprised, that the Durban Review Conference could not – or would not – do likewise.

Especially in the light of this political failure, we welcome the recent leadership of the High Commissioner for Human Rights on this important issue, and we hope that the proposed observatory on discrimination may help throw further light on the situation of the millions of victims of untouchability practices.

- **Statement from WCC conference: Churches Responding to the Challenges of Racism and Related Forms of Discrimination and Exclusion, Doorn, Netherlands, 17 June 2009**

Break down the walls! End racism and racial discrimination!

Organized to commemorate the 40th anniversary of the Programme to Combat Racism in co-operation with the Council of Churches in the Netherlands, ICCO, the Association of Migrant Churches (SKIN), KerkinActie and Oikos Foundation

Called together by the World Council of Churches (WCC) on the occasion of the 40th anniversary of the Programme to Combat Racism (PCR) and based upon our understandings of the basic principles of our faith, we believe that all Christians have a common responsibility to work for racial justice and inclusion, and with those suffering racial discrimination and exclusion, such as Dalits, migrants, people of African descent, Roma, indigenous communities and the Palestinian people.

1. We call upon the World Council of Churches to renew and refocus its priorities so as to initiate a new churches' movement to address racism, casteism and related forms of exclusion in the new context of global economic and environmental crisis, and also resurgent nationalism. This movement should be based on the lived experience of people and communities directly affected by these processes of exclusion and injustice. It should engage the communities within civil society already seeking racial, economic and environmental justice, reach out to other church constituencies beyond the membership of the WCC, and focus especially on youth and children. We therefore call upon the WCC to initiate a Decade for Overcoming Racism and Creating Just and Inclusive Communities.
2. We request the WCC to urge the Indian churches to address the issue of caste discrimination as a key priority.
3. The Programme to Combat Racism has played an historic role in inspiring a generation of anti-racist struggle in the churches. The PCR's history is an invaluable resource for the churches for the ongoing struggle, and we request the WCC to document its history and significance in a form that can be easily shared – ideally as a short video, distributed as DVD and/or online. PCR-inspired actions and other relevant initiatives and materials in many churches around the world have not yet been gathered as a collective resource for the future. We call for the establishment of a means (preferably online) for gathering these materials and resources and making them accessible to churches and others around the world.
4. We recommend that the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (21 March) be adopted as an annual ecumenical event, with the churches developing, sharing and disseminating relevant liturgies, prayers and other materials for the occasion.

5. We believe that it is necessary to develop a new articulation of the ecumenical commitment to challenging discrimination and promoting racial justice and inclusion, using especially visual/graphic image and popular cultural expression, and urge the WCC to address this.
6. We consider that we as churches and individual Christians should consciously reflect on the ways in which we perpetuate exclusion and racist discrimination through misuse of Scripture, and through traditions, attitudes and practices of exclusion – and should seek to cleanse the church of these tendencies. Essential to achieving this objective will be the promotion of multicultural, multigenerational and multicontextual biblical interpretation of Bible passages dealing with issues of racism and exclusion based on descent and the creation of resources by the churches to address this.
7. We need new and challenging theological and anthropological approaches towards racial justice, drawing on existing discourses from the perspective of the excluded and oppressed, adopting a human rights approach and deconstructing the position of the dominant.
8. We must all promote sensitivity to and awareness of the racist subtext of common expressions in which black and white are used as metaphors for negative and positive values, and seek the elimination of these expressions from our usage, especially by those in positions of leadership and influence in church and society.

Theological comment

In a world groaning in the pain of brokenness, exploitation, and fragmentation of the wounded and outcast humanity, God demonstrates the divine love by accompanying humanity in this time and place. Integral to creation, God created human beings, all different, with equal rights and responsibilities in the household (*oikos*) of God. Human beings living in interdependence manifest the divine presence. The African understanding of *Ubuntu* calls us to be fully human in direct connection with the other. The other person is not a stranger. He or she is not apart from us: *I am because you are*. We cannot be without the other. We belong together.

Our vocation as Christian communities is to practice a theology of solidarity and hospitality as embodied in the prophetic discipleship of Jesus Christ. This theology is characterized by integrity, honesty, humility, compassion, love, justice and reconciliation. We believe dignity and human rights to be at the heart of the Christian gospel and, as concretized by international conventions, the most constructive framework for the church's advocacy work. The principle of anti-discrimination is integral to equity for all.

The people of God is a community of love and freedom, it is a church which includes the oppressed and disenfranchised and those victimized by racist policies and institutions. It transcends all boundaries and rejects prejudiced ideologies, to build new, *just and inclusive* communities. We commit ourselves to live by the power of love and not the love of power.

Who we are, why we are here and what we believe

We are women and men, young and old, lay persons and clergy, church administrators and activists, academics and theologians from the four corners of the earth. Fifty of us met together for three days invited by the World Council of Churches on the 40th anniversary of the Programme to Combat Racism and also on the 33rd anniversary of the Soweto uprising and the 20th anniversary of the fall of the Berlin wall. We celebrated the significant contribution of the PCR to ending apartheid and encouraging the churches to address racism. We recognized however that we have failed to eradicate racism. We also challenged the exclusion from this debate of any relevant situation, including that of the Palestinian people.

We believe this is a *kairos* moment for committed action by the churches and beyond, it's God's special time, a time of crisis and opportunity. **We believe** that this is a moment where we are invited by God to commit ourselves to be instruments of change in the church and the wider society. **We believe** God is calling members of the church to action with and on behalf of the marginalized, the poor and the many who face exclusion. **We believe** that in answering this call, we have the faith and the resources to make a difference in the global community in which we reside.

We believe God says: Enough is Enough!

We have raped the planet. We have stolen each others' possessions. Out of our greed, we have created an ideology of exclusion and discrimination. The global economic crisis, climate change and systemic exclusion – generating desperation and increased migration – is the three-fold crisis creating the *kairos* and calling us to repentance. We have failed to love our neighbours as ourselves. We must repent of the sin of racism, and of consumerism and capitalism. All are rebellion against God.

God says: Enough is Enough!

It is time for a new movement. It is time for a new world, as a just and inclusive community. It is a time for a new spirituality that values *ubuntu* over individualism, interdependence over nationalism, and the content of character over skin colour. This new spirituality calls us to embrace the presence of God in all creation as we say: I am because creation is.

God says: Enough is Enough!

We have resources of resistance. We have resources of sustainability. We have resources of faith which root our hope in a future that promises equity and wholeness for all God's people.

Confession

As the church we are members of communities targeted by judgments made on the basis of caste, race, gender, xenophobia and related forms of intolerance. Simultaneously, we confess that we are communities that often make false judgments of others, we are guilty and we seek to protect our privilege through exclusion of others.

We acknowledge that as churches we have often been constricted by our tradition, institutions and structures of power. Sometimes, working in the interest of the state and of capital, we have failed to challenge the laws, institutions and structures of power and

oppression. We have failed to live out the vision of a household of God and our shared understandings of hospitality, inclusiveness and justice within our faith, and with other faiths.

We long to participate in God's promise of a reconciled world. We confess that we are both oppressors and oppressed, and acknowledge our need for repentance. We confess the need for repair and reparation as we commit to our wholeness and unity.

Our commitment

We who have gathered here commit to expanding our ways of working to transform our churches, communities and the world for a racially just future.

We call on and invite the participation of all sectors of the ecumenical movement to, as the WCC said at the World Conference against Racism 2001, to "earnestly strive to break the cycles of global racism and assist the oppressed to achieve self-determination".

- **Statement on caste-based discrimination, adopted by WCC central committee, Geneva, Switzerland, 26 August–2 September 2009**

“Every human being, created in the image of God, is a person for whom Christ has died. Racism, which is the use of a person’s racial origins to determine the person’s value, is an assault on Christ’s values and a rejection of his sacrifice. Wherever it appears, whether in the individual or in the collective, it is sin. It must be openly fought by all those who are on Christ’s side, and by the church as the designated vehicle and instrument of Christ’s purpose in the world.”

(Excerpt from the statement of the Conference on Racism in Notting Hill, UK in 1969)

1. At least 160 million people in India and up to 260 million people globally are considered by their own societies as “untouchable” – as polluted and polluting on account of caste – a peculiar system of social stratification that has its origins in South Asia. The entrenched attitudes of caste identity and discrimination, founded upon a presumption of inequality which directly contradicts the fundamental principle that all people are born equal in dignity and rights, continue to affect a large number of people in many ways. Although “untouchability” and discrimination on the basis of caste were abolished according to the Indian constitution, these practices continue to determine the socio-economic and religious standing of those at the bottom of and outside the caste hierarchy and their consequent disempowerment. According to statistics compiled by India's National Crime Records Bureau, “Every hour two Dalits are assaulted; every day three Dalit women are raped, two Dalits are murdered, two Dalit homes are torched, and in the year 2000, 25,455 crimes were committed against the Dalits”.
2. The stigma that is attached to Dalits is based on their descent and their traditional occupations – usually the most dirty, dangerous and demeaning occupations in their societies. One of the most extreme examples of caste-based assignment of the worst jobs is “manual scavenging”, the manual collection and removal of human faeces

from dry latrines. Although, the Indian National Human Rights Commission has called manual scavenging “one of the worst violations of human rights”, and despite the adoption of legal measures to eradicate manual scavenging, this age old system is still being practiced in many parts of India.

3. Discrimination based on caste persists in several parts of India and elsewhere, regardless of any personal qualities or achievements an individual may have. While untouchability has been constitutionally abolished and a range of legislative measures, including a complex system of affirmative action known as “reservations”, are in place, Dalits continue to be excluded, marginalized and shunned in all aspects of life and their efforts to claim justice are met with violent reprisals. When Dalits and other caste-affected groups challenge practices of untouchability, they often face violent sanctions and social boycotts. Having been relegated to a segregated position characterized by poverty and misery for centuries, they continue to be the most disadvantaged, particularly of the Indian population. Poverty, illiteracy, unemployment, disease and malnutrition, and crime and violence exist among the Dalits on a large-scale. The Dalits of India provide the paradigmatic example of social exclusion on the basis of their caste identity.
4. Continuing the practice of caste-based discrimination and untouchability affecting such a large number of people in so many ways must, therefore, be confronted. It is unfortunate that the practice of caste-based discrimination exists in some churches in India. The Dalit Christians in India are also discriminated against by the state, which denies them certain rights and privileges ascribed to other Dalits as part of its affirmative action. It is becoming increasingly evident that the similar features of the South Asian caste system that are a product of inherited social exclusion and discrimination are shared with a number of other geographically and culturally disparate societies.
5. The World Council of Churches (WCC) has long been involved in supporting the efforts of assisting churches and civil society organizations engaged in the struggle of Dalits against discrimination. The WCC accompanied churches in India in various ways to promote the concerns pertaining to the plight of Dalits in that country. The WCC made interventions at the United Nations (UN) Human Rights Commissions in the past. Most recently, the WCC in partnership with the Lutheran World Federation (LWF), made an oral intervention at the Durban Review Conference in Geneva on 21 April 2009. It expressed regret that both the World Conference against Racism in 2001 and the Durban Review Conference in 2009 failed to acknowledge the suffering of the more than 200 million Dalits in South Asia who are discriminated against on the basis of work and descent. It further stated that, in spite of the many assurances given by governments in caste affected countries, it was saddened by the daily suffering of so many millions of Dalits today; suffering that includes murder, rape, mutilations, beatings, humiliation, extreme poverty and grinding discrimination and exclusion. Prior to this, in March 2009, the WCC and the LWF had jointly convened a global ecumenical conference in Bangkok in solidarity with the Dalits and their struggle for justice, which called upon the ecumenical community to join

the struggle against caste-based discrimination, which is considered the largest systemic violation of human rights in the world today.

6. Commemorating the historic event of the 40th anniversary of the Notting Hill Conference on Racism, a WCC conference on “Racism and related forms of discrimination and exclusion” in Doorn, The Netherlands in June 2009 called for a recommitment to overcoming racism and related forms of discrimination. It acknowledged that millions of people in many parts of the world and at all levels continued to be affected by the practice of racism and discrimination. In particular, it underlined the following forms of exclusion as warranting an urgent Christian response:

“We call upon the World Council of Churches to renew and refocus its priorities so as to initiate a new churches' movement to address racism, casteism and related forms of exclusion in the new context of global economic and environmental crisis, and also resurgent nationalism... We believe dignity and human rights to be at the heart of the Christian gospel and, as concretized by international conventions, the most constructive framework for the church's advocacy work...”

Indeed this reality of discrimination and the exclusion of millions of people in many parts of the world today is a matter of serious challenge to our faith in God, who created us all equal. Therefore, against this background, the central committee of the WCC, in its meeting in Geneva, Switzerland, 26 August – 2 September 2009:

- A. **Asserts** its conviction that “caste-based discrimination is a crime” and that “casteism is sin” because it contradicts the Christian teaching that all are created in the image and likeness of God.
- B. **Calls** upon WCC member churches and partners to recognize the continued discrimination and exclusion of millions of people on the basis of caste as a serious challenge to the credibility of their witness to their faith in God, and to take necessary steps to expose and transform structures and cultures which perpetuate these gross injustices.
- C. **Calls** upon its member churches to recognize the fact that untouchability practised against Dalits in India and South Asian countries as well as other similarly affected communities elsewhere, represents one of the gravest systemic violation of human rights in the world today.
- D. **Urges** the UN Human Rights Council to ensure that the draft Principles and Guidelines for the Effective Elimination of Discrimination based on Work and Descent, developed under the former Sub-Commission on the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights, are adopted in order to provide a firm and appropriate basis for the international community to address caste-based discrimination.
- E. **Supports** the ongoing work of the UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, the International Labour Organization and other international organizations to address untouchability and caste-based discrimination around the world.

- F. *Calls* upon the governments to ensure that their trade and development policies, and their roles at the UN and its related bodies, the European Union or other appropriate institutions, contribute to international recognition of and cooperation to eradicate caste-based discrimination and to render justice to the Dalits.
- G. *Endorses* the Bangkok Call to urge national and international ecumenical bodies to develop further their on-going work on justice for Dalits and to collaborate to establish a global watch on violence against Dalits, creating a communication system between all member churches and beyond.
- H. *Expresses* its support for the struggles of Dalit Christians in India in the face of the denial of their constitutional rights on account of their religious affiliation.
- I. *Calls* upon churches and the international community to support the campaign for the elimination of “manual scavenging” in India by 2010.
- J. *Invites* the participation of all sectors of the ecumenical movement to, as was stated at the World Conference against Racism in 2001, “earnestly strive to break the cycles of global racism and assist the oppressed to achieve self-determination”.
- K. *Urges* interfaith converzations to address the ethical and theological challenges posed by the reality of caste-based discrimination.

Indigenous Peoples

- **Joint statement critical of carbon trading delivered by the Indigenous Environmental Network and other Indigenous representatives at the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues (PFII), New York, USA, 2 May 2008**

Indigenous Peoples attending the Permanent Forum are outraged that their rejection of the carbon market has been ignored in the final report of the 7th Session of the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues (PFII). The final report of the PFII hails World Bank funded carbon trading, like the Clean Development Mechanism, as "good examples" of partnership despite the human rights violations and environmental destruction they have caused.

"Indigenous Peoples attending the 7th session of the Permanent Forum are profoundly concerned that our key recommendations on climate change are not being taken into account by the Permanent Forum. This Permanent Forum was created precisely to recognize, promote, and support the rights of Indigenous Peoples," says Florina Lopez, Coordinator of the Indigenous Women's Biodiversity Network of Abya Yala.

Throughout the two weeks of the Permanent Forum, Indigenous community representatives have consistently testified about the injustices associated with the clean development mechanism projects and have asked that the Permanent Forum not promote

the projects. However, in the final report of the Permanent Forum (document E/C.19/2008/L.2) adopted today, these injustices have been ignored.

In response, many groups under the name of the Indigenous Caucus of Abya Yala took the floor today to express their concerns. Their statement affirmed that the recommendations of the Permanent Forum do not properly reflect their positions. They used the opportunity to affirm their rejection of carbon trading mechanisms and concerns over specific implementations. Over 30 organizations at the forum called for the final report to include a section outlining their concerns.

In the background paper for this session (Document E/C.19/2008/10), three projects are being upheld to illustrate the "clean development mechanism projects that are being implemented in indigenous peoples territories with good results." However, there are grave problems with each of these projects including violations of the rights enshrined in the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. For example, the Jeripachi wind power project in Colombia did not get the free, prior, and informed consent of the Wayuu people to build this wind farm in a sacred territory of the Wayuu People. Indigenous Peoples' organizations contend the assassination of over 200 Wayuu People prior to the implementation of the project was to clear the area for this and other projects.

Additionally, most of the energy generated from the wind farm is used to power the Cerrajon mine, the biggest open air coal mine in the world, which itself is known for numerous human rights violations and environmental damages. Representatives of the Wayuu people who attended the Permanent Forum didn't even know the project was being promoted as a good example.

"In promoting the clean development mechanism projects and carbon trading, the Permanent Forum is allowing oil companies who are the biggest emitters for greenhouse gases, to continue to pollute," says Tom Goldtooth, Executive director of the Indigenous Environmental Network. "Promoting the commodification of the air is a corruption of our traditional teachings and violates the original instructions of Indigenous Peoples.

- **Statement of solidarity with indigenous peoples from the “International Consultation on Ecclesial and Social Visions of the Indigenous Peoples”, Baguio City, Philippines, 26 October 2008**

We, the participants of the International Consultation on the Ecclesial and Social Visions of the Indigenous Peoples, sponsored by the World Council of Churches held at the Igorot Lodge, Baguio City, Philippines from October 21-27, 2008 declare

- That we maintain ardent solidarity with the indigenous peoples' struggles and aspirations.

As we listened to each other during the Consultation and immersed ourselves into the very lives of the indigenous peoples in this part of the world, we affirm the vital interconnectedness of the indigenous people with the land, our ancestral domain;

We are linked with the mountains, rivers, caves, trees and villages. We are the true stewards of the land. While multinational corporations and big business exploit and devastate nature at a disastrous pace, we give utmost respect and care to nature because we know that it sustains our lives, our existence and to ensure the survival of succeeding generations. Respect for the land and the rest of creation is respect for life knowing that life is sustained by the land given by God;

We have also been reminded of the neglect, exploitation, and abuse by social institutions some of them established by our Christian brethren. As a result, we are among the most depressed and poorest people of the land;

The sacredness and defense of life is also Biblical and a foundation of Christian praxis as it is with the land and everything in it, on it and above it.

As we struggle to keep our lands against the forces of development aggression, greed and profit, as we assert our place in the community of peoples, and as we resolve to declare the values of indigenous peoples on stewardship and community as essential in the vision of just and inclusive communities, we are appalled by the continuing litany of enforced disappearances in the Philippines, the latest of which is the enforced disappearance of our brother James Balao.

Mr James Balao, as established by direct interview and dialogue conducted and participated in by the delegates of this Consultation, is an indigenous person (Ibaloi) who devoted his life advocating the rights of the Igorots in this part of the Philippines. He is one of the finest sons of the Cordilleras, home to the Igorots. His enforced disappearance outraged not only the Igorots but the other local citizens and the local governments in the region. According to reliable witnesses, his abduction was perpetrated by the police or military intelligence elements as evidenced by the precision it was conducted and the traits of the persons involved in the brazen kidnap of James Balao.

We now further declare,

- Our deepest concern and condemnation of the abduction of James Balao and other atrocities committed against the indigenous people in this part of the world; we reach out in prayer and solidarity with his family and the families of all other victims and affirm our support in their search for justice;
- Our demand for responsible government agencies for expeditious investigation and action to locate and surface James Balao;
- Our demand for the intervention of the highest authority in the Philippines;
- Our call to our sisters and brothers all over the world to write to the authorities in the Philippines, directly or through the National Council of Churches in the Philippines expressing their concern and declaring their protest over the anti-insurgency policy of the state, through OPLAN Bantay Laya. The latter provides the mechanism to suppress any principled dissent and has led to extrajudicial killings and enforced disappearances in the Philippines.

Finally, we express our support to the United Nations Declaration of the Rights of the Indigenous People that states among others,

- That Indigenous peoples have the right to the lands, territories and resources which they have traditionally owned, occupied or otherwise used or acquired;
- That Indigenous peoples have the right to own, use, develop and control the lands, territories and resources that they possess by reason of traditional ownership or other traditional occupation or use, as well as those which they have otherwise acquired;
- That State shall give legal recognition and protection to these lands, territories and resources. Such recognition shall be conducted with due respect to the customs, traditions and land tenure systems of the indigenous peoples concerned. (UNDRIP Section 26).

Let us hold on to the vision expressed of old: "Once more I will plant them in their own soil, and they shall never again be uprooted from the soil I have given them." (Amos 9:15)

- **Joint declaration of indigenous churches made at the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, 21 May 2009**

Madame Chair,

Sisters and Brothers, representatives of the Indigenous Peoples of the world and their organizations.

Greetings from the Indigenous Peoples who are fighting for our rights, from Indigenous churches and from Indigenous social movements and organizations, with the hope that God and Mother Earth may bless and enlighten you in this work on behalf of our people. We Indigenous Peoples have always been subjects of our history, and this is made clear in the testimonies of the struggles, deeds, grievances and accusations that we hear and experience each day. As Indigenous evangelical churches, we affirm our commitment and participation in the construction of a better life, the *Sumaj Kawsay/ Suma Qamaña*.

We recognize that the right to life is comprised not only of human beings, but also of all forms of life as well as Mother Earth who, for us, is alive. Our spirituality allows us to live in an interconnected manner because we know that all we do can affect the world's delicate balance. We do not separate our profound spirituality from our political struggles.

We condemn the violence and the accusations of terrorism that the Indigenous People who fight for the rights of our people must endure, especially in Chile, Colombia, Peru, Guatemala, Australia and the Philippines, whose voices have not been brought to this Forum.

We condemn the incomprehensibility of States that sign the Declaration but do little to implement it or, even worse, persecute the Indigenous People that fight for its implementation.

That is why we call on the sisters and brothers who take an active role in our homes, neighborhoods, communities, and Indigenous churches, from the countryside and the city, to demand that the States implement the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

We recommend:

- That the Forum promote and support the popularization of the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples up to the last village on Earth and that Indigenous churches become centers for information and training of the Peoples.
- That the Forum recommend that States and ecclesiastical bodies recognize Indigenous churches.
- That the Forum recommend and promote dialogue and debate on the diversity and spiritual and religious experiences of Indigenous Peoples.
- That the Forum recommend the recognition of Mother Earth as a legal subject and that Human Rights be expanded to include all forms of life.
- That the Forum and the UN foster and support the right to self-determination of Indigenous Peoples of the world, as well as the ratification and implementation of ILO Convention 169 and the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples by the States.
- That the Forum and Indigenous Peoples support Indigenous processes in various countries and that States be declared intercultural and multinational.
- That the Forum support women's organizations and their pursuit of participation in organizations and institutions as a fundamental human right.
- That the Forum request a special rapporteur and promote a commission for the investigation, condemnation and promotion of laws against the trafficking of women and the sexual abuse of children, and to condemn from our Forum all forms of violence against women.
- That the Forum continue visiting the locations where violence and abuse of the rights of Indigenous Peoples is experienced and draw up reports that can impact and change the focus of the application of international law.
- That the Forum recommend that States protect the human rights of Indigenous Peoples against those who contribute to the development of industries that continue to burden Mother Earth and Indigenous Peoples.

Thank you very much for allowing us to speak and express our faith.

- **Letter from WCC general secretary to Sr. Alan Garcia Pérez, president of the Republic of Peru expressing concern over the loss of life and violent displacement of indigenous peoples, 9 June 2009**

Your Excellency,

The World Council of Churches is a fellowship of churches with 340 member churches worldwide representing over 550 million Christians.

The World Council of Churches expresses its engagement guided by:

- the recognition of the need to clarify issues of denial, destruction and denigration of Indigenous spiritualities and ancestral values;
- the affirmation of Indigenous Peoples' right to reclaim what has been denied them and threatened with destruction – their culture, identity, language, cultural symbols, ancestral land, sacred sites;
- the respect for the Indigenous Peoples' right to define for themselves their political, economic, cultural and spiritual development;
- the affirmation of the churches' responsibility to promote awareness of the issues and concerns of Indigenous Peoples;
- the affirmation of the important role of education in developing and understanding of a commitment to the struggles of Indigenous Peoples; and
- an appreciation of Indigenous wisdom and the distinct contribution Indigenous Peoples can make to the development of new approaches, methodologies and tools of knowledge.

I write to express our deepest concern over the loss of life and violent displacement of indigenous people Awajun and Wambis in Bagua, Peru, June 5, 2009. All life is a gift from God and for that reason we deplore the Peruvian government's inability to resolve the conflict around land use and extractive industries in Bagua justly and peacefully.

We join with the Organization of American States and Religious Organizations and Human Rights groups the world over in repudiating this violence and calling for an independent internationally lead investigation. We are also alarmed by reports of attempts to dispose of the bodies and cover up the true extent of the loss of life.

Moreover, we understand this tragic and violent attack to be but one instance of a series of government actions to abrogate the rights of the Indigenous peoples of the Peruvian Amazon over land and resources. The events of June 5 were in response to peaceful protests over the application of Decree 1090 which authorizes the sale and exploitation of millions of hectares government controlled Amazonian forests to private companies.

The World Council of Churches has stood in solidarity with the world's indigenous people and in promoting and supporting the United Nations Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. Decree 1090 and the recent attacks in Bagua contravenes the spirit and letter of the UNDRIP and the provisions of International Law including ILO Convention 169.

Your government should respect and fulfil all the obligations arising from the International law Instruments to which it is a signatory.

Thus, I respectfully urge you and the Peruvian Congress to:

- Order an immediate cessation of violent repression against indigenous people, who are peacefully seeking to restore their rights,
- Suspend the State of Emergency,
- Start a sincere and faith meaningful dialogue with indigenous leaders to peacefully and justly resolve the conflict and move towards a full application of the UNDRIP and ILO Convention 169 in all the laws and practices of the Republic of Peru.

Together with the prophet Isaiah and in accordance with the values for which your Government stands, we urge that justice is ensured to the Indigenous Peoples and their legitimate rights and aspirations are upheld. As Christians we believe that “for as the earth brings forth its shoots, and as a garden causes what is sown in it to spring up, so the Lord God will cause justice and praise to spring up before all the nations” (Isaiah 61:11).

Sincerely yours,
Rev. Dr Samuel Kobia
General secretary

- **Global migration and new ecclesial realities, address by WCC general secretary, Cardiff, United Kingdom, 25 April 2007**

Migration is one of the main features of the changing global context, with decisive consequences for the church and the ecumenical movement locally and globally. More people throughout the world are being forced to leave their homes because of wars, human rights violations, dire poverty or environmental destruction. In the coming years, ecological migrants will increase in number because of the effects of climate change. But more than any other cause, wars lead to the massive displacement of hundreds of thousands of people, as happened to the Lebanese as a consequence of Israel's military actions. While several hundred thousand Lebanese were able to leave their country for Syria, Cyprus and other countries, over half a million Lebanese were displaced from their homes but remained within the country. These internally displaced people are often more vulnerable to violence and face more difficulties in accessing humanitarian assistance than those who were able to make it across an international border. While television screens were filled with pictures of some foreigners being evacuated from Lebanon, there were many other foreigners in Lebanon whose governments were unable to support their evacuation. Tens of thousands of Asian domestic workers, for example, were forced to remain in the country.

The war in Iraq has forced some two million Iraqis to flee to neighboring countries while another two million are displaced within their own country. This is the largest displacement in the Middle East since the 1948 Palestinian refugee crisis. Presently one in eight Iraqis is displaced. Most of the refugees are in Syria and Jordan, but they face restrictions on employment and access to social services. Many Iraqi refugee children, for example, are not in schools. Other governments in the region have closed their borders to Iraqis fleeing the violence of their homeland. Within Iraq, the internally displaced people are particularly vulnerable and both Iraqi and international NGOs find it increasingly difficult to provide humanitarian assistance because of the security situation. The Iraqi Red Crescent is the only organization working throughout the country and around Christmas, a number of their staff were kidnapped by extremist organizations. Some of the Iraqi governorates have refused to allow Iraqis from other parts of the country to enter their communities. The displacement of Iraqis is changing the demographic "geography" of the country as people are leaving mixed neighborhoods for ones where there is a majority of a particular sect. The consequences of Iraqi displacement will be felt for many years, perhaps even decades.

From rural to urban areas, from poor to emerging economies in the South, from countries of the South to countries of the North – migration has become a trend impacting most societies worldwide. The number of international migrants has increased to more than 175 million in 2005, according to the International Organization for Migration (IOM). Today, one in fifty people on earth are living outside their home countries, while an estimated 25 million have been forcibly displaced within their own countries. At the same

time that globalization is leading to freer movement of capital, goods and services, walls are going up to limit the movement of people across borders. As the “human side” of globalization, the phenomenon of migration means that virtually all societies are multicultural and multi-religious.

In June 2006, the United Nations issued a report on international migration and development that explored how migration is helping countries expand their economies, meet shortages of workers and lift themselves from poverty. According to the report, migration is no longer a one-way ticket to geographic and cultural isolation. Today, immigrants are able to contribute not only to their new countries, as they have always done, but can more easily help their countries of origin as well. The vast flows of remittances – which last year exceeded \$230 billion and now dwarf international aid – are only the most tangible expression of this. In addition, immigrants are using their skills and savings to help their home countries grow, even when they remain abroad. At the same time, the UN report acknowledges that migration has many negative consequences – political, economic and social – and calls on governments to strengthen instruments to protect the rights of migrants.

Migration is a global issue, affecting societies around the world and continues to grow as a consequence of the increased integration of world economies over the past decade. However, Migration from Pacific countries is changing the nature of island societies and local economies. South Africa deported more than 50,000 irregular Zimbabwean immigrants in the first six months of 2006 as floods of people fled economic collapse in their country. Much of the domestic policy debate in the United States this year focused on immigration reform. Migrants from North Africa set out in small boats for European shores in record numbers, provoking political crises for countries such as Malta and Spain. The increasing emigration of Christians from the Middle East has long been a concern to churches in the region. Periodic crackdowns in Thailand lead to the deportation of tens of thousands of Burmese migrants who have come to Thailand because they cannot survive at home.

In 2005, the WCC central committee meeting before the Porto Alegre assembly addressed these realities through a public issue statement on “Practicing hospitality in an era of new forms of migration”. This document summarizes well the impact of globalization and the post-11 September 2001 concerns for security in regard to the movement of people. The document points to both negative and positive consequences for sending and receiving countries. While remittances have far and away surpassed development aid, Africa already has lost one-third of its educated and skilled labour. “Brain drain” has severe consequences for countries like Ghana that lost to migration 60% of its graduating doctors in the 1980s. Today we can ask: how many of the skilled professionals who fled Lebanon in July and August 2006 will return to help re-build their country? And we can only speculate on the long-term consequences for Iraq of the departure of much of the country’s educated middle class. Receiving countries benefit from the skills and contributions of immigrants. Nevertheless, some politicians blame immigrants for unemployment, crime and other problems of their economies, thus fuelling racism and xenophobia in their societies, often with severe consequences for migrants who are subject to harassment and even murder.

Addressing the emerging trends of migration, our WCC statement draws attention to the trafficking of women and children. It says, “600,000 to 800,000 human beings are trafficked every year with annual profits of US\$ 8-10 billion.” In many cases the marginalization and exploitation especially of trafficked women and children, but also of adult men, amount to new forms of slavery. Because of their “illegal” status, they are left without any protection and support.

The document highlights the devastating impact of military interventions and war, but also emphasizes that governmental concerns with security and migration have led to unacceptable forms of detention, imprisonment and forced deportation of refugees and asylum seekers in a number of countries. I myself have witnessed the inhuman situation in a detention camp in Australia which, at least at that time, provided a parallel with prison conditions in Guantanamo Bay. The statement concludes with very clear and practical recommendations to the churches on how to offer hospitality to those who arrive in their countries, to combat stigma and discrimination in their societies and to challenge government policies.

New ecclesial realities

The 2005 WCC central committee statement provides a solid basis to engage with the consequences of migration in our societies. It is a real public issue statement. Migration, however, also has a very deep impact on the churches themselves with important challenges to their ecumenical relationships both locally and globally. And it is for this reason that I have decided to make it the central theme of my report.

Intra-national or international migration flows have an impact on the churches from which migrants leave as well as on the churches in their host countries. This is most obviously manifest in the increasing number of new diaspora churches in all countries and regions of the world. The recent multiplication of Orthodox churches all over the world is worth mentioning particularly, as is the remarkable presence in Northern countries of many churches of African origin. Diaspora experience modifies both the “host” and the “guest” churches, and their customary theological or ecclesiological approaches. This is particularly visible in large cities, where migrant churches provide a haven and home for the most vulnerable, offering material support, cultural space, an affirmation of identity and the opportunity for religious expression. In many countries, the growth of such churches is significantly changing the religious and ecumenical scene.

Geneva is a good example. For centuries, Geneva has attracted substantial numbers of foreigners – refugees, business people, employees of international organizations. But in recent decades the figures have drastically increased. According to government statistics the number of people in Geneva of African origin and from Eastern Europe has doubled between 1989 and 2002. Those from Asia and Latin America have increased about 50%. More than 50% of residents in the city of Geneva now come from abroad.

The official figures, however, cover only those people who have been officially registered. They do not take into account the many persons without legal status – immigrants looking for a job, asylum seekers and others. This great diversity of people is also mirrored in church life. There are more than sixty Protestant communities of different origin in Geneva. While for many language, culture or ethnic background is the

common denominator, others bring together people from different countries. A number of them are bilingual and provide simultaneous French-English interpretation. Some worship in the churches and community centres of the Protestant Church of Geneva, but the majority of them have found their own spaces – sometimes just a garage or a room in a basement. At the same time, other churches of Roman Catholic and Orthodox tradition have come into existence as have new religious communities of Muslim, Jewish and other faiths. It is interesting to note that most members of conservative evangelical and Pentecostal churches in Geneva are foreigners.

While migrant churches are being established throughout the world, there are many cases where churches in host countries have opened their doors to migrants and have been transformed in the process. Almost all clergy ordained in the Methodist Church of Aotearoa/New Zealand, for example, are Pacific Islanders. The more conservative social theologies of Pacific Christians are changing the policies and practices of churches in Australia and Aotearoa/New Zealand. The Waldensian Church in Italy now has many more African members than Italian ones as a result of a deliberate decision by the church to welcome immigrants and to be transformed in the process. St. Andrew's Church in Cairo has similarly been profoundly changed by the active participation of Sudanese Christians in its church life. For many US mainline churches, growth in church membership is happening primarily through increasing Hispanic and Asian participation.

There are varying degrees of integration of migrants into the life of host churches. In some cases, churches arrange parallel services for migrants so that they may worship in their own languages. Thus, some congregations in the US will have several worship services on Sunday: in English, Spanish, Korean and Kiswahili, for example. In some cases, migrants establish mission churches, reaching out to English-speaking communities.

Of course, migration is bound to change local ecumenism and its organizational expressions. The same is true for the national level. It has been quite some time since the Nigerian-founded Church of the Lord (Aladura) joined the British Council of Churches, today's Churches Together in Britain and Ireland. But there are now developments where, in Switzerland for instance, churches of people of African origin have formed their own umbrella organization (Conference of the African Churches in Switzerland) that is now looking for membership in the Federation of Swiss Protestant Churches. The Conference of European Churches has received similar requests from Korean churches and churches of African immigrants. They all say: "We are no longer foreigners. We live together with you in Europe, in this country, in this city. We see ourselves as integral to the one Church, and we wish to become a more visible expression of the Church of Christ in this place." The changing ecclesial realities in Europe demands for churches to remain "united in diversity" or "being church together." The European Union plans to have a year of "intercultural dialogue" in 2008, it will offer an ideal opportunity for the churches to highlight the uniting in diversity aspects for churches, just like the anniversary of the official end of the slave trade is another opportunity for the churches in the United Kingdom.

There are encouraging examples from various cities and countries of how the process of integration and ecumenical relationships between different churches may be fostered. I

am sure that many of you representing churches from around the globe are in a position to share positive examples showing where the Holy Spirit wants to lead us with these new developments. But we also know that in the process of mutual encounter and growing together, old wounds of history, racism and cultural differences must be addressed. Historically, colonialism accompanied European migration into all regions of the world. People were driven from their lands, their livelihoods were undermined, and many were killed. Colonial conquest and the slave trade deeply changed the ethnic composition of this world in a violent and radical way, and this has left its mark even on the churches. To this day, the consequences of slavery and racism impact on relationships between churches; for instance, in the USA this history necessarily has been addressed in the process of uniting churches. The impact of migration today confronts churches with racism and xenophobia in new but similarly violent forms.

Churches which seek to open themselves to people of different ethnic origins and cultural backgrounds often find the process to be more difficult than anticipated. Migrants bring with them different theological traditions, different liturgies and different music that can enrich churches – but also may divide them. Philip Jenkins argues, in “The Next Christendom”, that Christian migrants from the South tend to be more socially conservative and more evangelical than the mainline churches in the North. They often gravitate towards evangelical and Pentecostal churches in the North, thus strengthening the more conservative evangelical churches and, at least indirectly, weakening certain ecumenical initiatives.

Churches, like the societies of which they are a part, are grappling with the questions of assimilation versus integration. It is easier for a church to welcome migrants as long as they adapt to the traditions and policies established by the host church. This is assimilation. Integration, on the other hand, implies a willingness to accept the contributions of migrants to change the church and to create something new. This is more difficult for many to accept. It has been argued that one of the reasons migrants establish their own churches is because they don’t feel that the established churches are ready to change to accommodate their needs.

The church of the stranger

Throughout the Bible and in the early church, people were called by God to love and offer hospitality to strangers and exiles (Lev. 19: 33-34; Rom. 15:7). The Bible contains many stories of people on the move, from Abram/Abraham and Sarah/Sarai to the Holy Family. Christ’s call to welcome the stranger (Matt. 25:31-45) is central to the gospel message. Welcoming the stranger is not optional for Christians. Nor is it conditional. Christ didn’t call for Christians to welcome those strangers whose papers are in order or who speak our language. Given the realities of migration today, welcoming strangers is not just about “being nice” to those who arrive on one’s doorstep. In today’s world, welcoming strangers is a justice issue, and often a political statement.

The church therefore should strengthen its capacity to practice hospitality in an era of new forms of migration. The church must be a strong advocate and defender of the right of people to move freely within their own nation and leave their home and live elsewhere in search of their God given right to life with dignity. We welcome the stranger with solidarity from the stand point of Christ and a common desire to seek justice and accept

Gods word. ““I now realize that it is true that God treats everyone on the same basis. Those who fear him and do what is right are acceptable to him, no matter what race they belong to.” (Acts 10:34-35) “I cannot therefore overemphasize the important fact that as a church we have a responsibility to ensure that public opinion is properly informed on the realities and true situations in the country of origin for the migrants. The threat to life, the poverty level, the environmental damages, the lack of social services and medicines, the tragedies that affect them and the risks involved in returning to their countries of origin. This step is crucial in order to guard against the rise of new forms of xenophobic action and racism take root in our communities, churches and countries. Secondly making migrants, who are our brothers and sisters, by faith becoming scapegoats for social, political and economic difficulties within the local situations.

It would be wrong to deny that welcoming strangers often goes hand in hand with a deep challenge to one’s own tradition and identity as a Christian and as a church. Unfortunately, it is not automatic that the experience of difference translates into the embrace of diversity and the sharing of different gifts. It requires a conscious choice to build relationships of trust and to be ready to change in the common encounter. Very often, difference is further deepened by lines drawn between differing communities that might even justify racist exclusion and oppression. The community that is called to share the bread and the wine with each other, and to follow Jesus in his ministry of healing and reconciliation, must not aggravate divisions; rather, it should become a bridge-builder. It ought to provide space for those who are different from one another to experience that they all belong to one humanity meant by God to share life on this planet.

We as Christians and as church must speak migration with an added perspective of gospel values. We recognize the need for governments to ensure the security of it people and nation. However, as Christians we should also look at every human being as an individual deserving to be treated with dignity and respect. As a church our response to migration should not only be determined by the prevailing laws but that it should challenge us to desire to overcome every form of injustice, discrimination and contempt shown to other people as every one of us is in the image of God. We should emphasize the fact that our response to migration is rooted in scripture and the social doctrine of the church. “When an alien resides with you in your land do not molest him. You shall treat the alien who resides with you no differently than the natives born among you, have the same love for him as for yourself, for you too were once aliens in the land of Egypt. I, the Lord , am your God.” (Lev 19:33-34) The World Council of Churches being an ecumenical body and seeking the unity of churches and human kind wishes to use the biblical foundation of welcoming the stranger to challenge churches to do their part. Offering hospitality and a way to receive those who come to our community with respect and dignity and strengthening the human relationships. The Churches’ Commission for Migrants in Europe, of which CTBI, is a member, is a cooperating partner on migration, refugees and work against racism, and this cooperation includes work with the Middle East Council of Churches through the Amman Process.

Over the centuries, Christian communities were ready to help people on the move. This was vital in times of persecution (1 Peter 4:9). Widows and deaconesses practiced hospitality (1 Timothy 5:10) and served strangers even in other countries. St Verena, a

nurse from Egypt, went to Switzerland in the 3rd century. There were St Anysia in Thessaloniki (3rd century), Olympias in Constantinople (4th century), St Melany from Rome (5th century), Juliette the Merciful in Russia (16th century). At the edge of the city of Caesarea in Cappadocia, St Basil began to construct a group of buildings destined to receive travelers and sick persons. In many other places similar houses were established in a ministry known as *xenodochia*.

Many churches remember that their ancestors had to leave their villages, cities and countries for the sake of their faith; they were expelled, or fled from war and genocide. In many parts of the world, there are churches that have existed and continue to exist as churches of refugees and migrants. There are also others who remember how their church received and welcomed these refugees into their midst. The 19th-century abolitionist movement in the US and Canada gave refuge to slaves on their way into freedom. Churches in Europe joined in helping people to escape from Nazi dictatorship and the gas chambers of Auschwitz. Today, churches in South America are working together to move to safety Colombians whose lives are in danger.

The challenge to our fellowship

Churches, from the very beginning of their existence, have built diaconal services for refugees and migrants. But they have always understood that the real challenge goes deeper and is indeed about sharing in solidarity the common life in Christ. Unavoidably, the situation of migrants puts the question to each of us: Who is my neighbour? Diaconia in this existential context reveals the deeper meaning of the *koinonia*, the fellowship in Christ.

The fifteenth-century Orthodox icon of the Holy Trinity by Andrei Rubliev identifies the divine communion between the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit with the communion of the three strangers who were received and fed by Abraham in the spirit of genuine hospitality (Genesis 18; Hebrews 13:2). As was expressed in the July 2004 Faith and Order Commission meeting, “through the practice of true hospitality, which transcends somehow the distinction between ‘host’ and ‘guest’, a mutual transformation takes place.”

Let me conclude my reflections by posing a number of questions: Does such true hospitality in the shared household of God provide us with an interim goal at the present stage of ecumenism? Can there be among us genuine hospitality, which helps to overcome the wounds of the past, to discover each other in new ways and to build the relationships and the community that will help us, finally, to discover and live out our oneness in Christ? Are we willing to take the necessary risks? Practicing true hospitality involves recognizing our own vulnerability and being open to transformation. “Let mutual love continue. Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by doing that some have entertained angels without knowing it. Remember those who are in prison, as though you were in prison with them; those who are being tortured, as though you yourselves were being tortured” (Heb 13:1-3). The process of welcoming strangers also leads us to look at our own societies in new ways and to see the racism and xenophobia that may not otherwise appear to us. Standing with migrants is politically unpopular in most regions of the world. The risks are very real, yet so is our calling.

Migration is a complex phenomenon which affects our societies, our churches and our ecumenical movement. This issue merits further reflection and discussion by churches locally and globally. In the WCC programme plans we are calling for public hearings in different regions this year and a major global consultation on “Migration and the changing ecclesial landscape” in 2008. Our initiative will be greatly enriched by input from different parts of the world, and I welcome the participation of the churches in Wales.

- **Meeting of the Global Ecumenical Network on Migration (GEM), Nairobi, Kenya, 6-8 June 2007**

Global Ecumenical Network to examine impact of migration on churches worldwide

"The impact of migration on the church and the ecclesial context" is the theme of a 6-8 June 2007 conference in Nairobi, Kenya of the Global Ecumenical Network on Migration (GEM). To be opened by Kenya's minister for immigration, and hosted by the All Africa Conference of Churches (AACC), the conference will be attended by representatives of churches, church-related organizations and ecumenical bodies in Africa, Asia, Australia, the Caribbean, Latin America, the Middle East, North America and the Pacific.

For the World Council of Churches (WCC), migration in today's globalized world raises questions about inter-faith relations, identity, justice, racism, advocacy and diakonia and, inevitably, affects the contexts in which churches live. The GEM network was formed by the WCC to engage and challenge churches in their work with migrants and, more generally, to understand global migration in order to equip churches and the WCC to bring their perspectives to bear and carry weight in global policy discussions.

Panel presentations on 6 June, the opening day of the conference, will address migrants' rights in Kenya, African Union/European Union agreements on migration, the effect of migration on women and children, and strategic planning and communication work with migrants carried out by AACC member churches.

After reports from regional representatives on the impact of migration on their continents, conference participants – including AACC Vice President Rev. Gertrude Kapuma and WCC President Rev. Dr Simon Dossou from Benin – will compare notes, learn from each others' experiences, develop a global analysis and set advocacy priorities together.

Participants will also take time to visit two refugee groups living in Nairobi: a women's group for refugees from Congo, Burundi and Rwanda and a group of Somali Christian refugees, as well as an outpatient medical clinic for refugees.

Other subjects to be discussed include the scope and work of the WCC's Migration and Social Justice Programme, the role of GEM members, and two events planned for later

this year: a 9-11 July Global Forum on Migration and Development in Brussels, and a public hearing on the impact of migration in the Middle East.

- **Comments of the delegates of AACC, Caritas Europa's Migration Commission, CCME, MECC and WCC to the Global Forum on Migration and Development, Brussels, Belgium, 9 July 2007**

“When an alien lives with you in your land you shall not ill-treat him. The alien living with you must be treated as a native-born. Love him as yourself for you were aliens in the land of Egypt” Leviticus 19, 33-34

Our organizations represent churches from Africa, Europe and the Middle East and globally – Anglican, Orthodox, Protestant and Roman Catholic – as well as Christian agencies particularly concerned with migrants and refugees and the issue of development. Based on the narrative of the Bible – a narrative of migration – we are deeply committed to the dignity of the human person, the concept of global solidarity and the promotion of a society welcoming strangers and respecting their rights. Being part of the global fellowship of churches, which is internationally active in promoting worldwide justice, we are particularly well acquainted with the links between development and migration.

**WE ARE PLEASED TO CONTRIBUTE TO THE GLOBAL FORUM ON
MIGRATION AND DEVELOPMENT**

- as it signals an end to overall restrictive migration policies in the North, which have proven to be unrealistic and unworkable and therefore lead to suffering of those migrating and anxiety in receiving countries, replacing them by a debate on positive impact of migration;
- because it acknowledges the need to have a truly global dialogue on migration and development, between countries of immigration, of transit and emigration, which goes beyond national or regional fora;
- because it creates a platform for dialogue between states and non-state actors, thus acknowledging the important input of non-state actors in developing coherence and synergy on migration and development.

IN ORDER TO BE SUCCESSFUL, THE FORUM WILL NEED TO

- start by acknowledging that migrants are not simply providers of manpower, but human individuals with dreams, hopes, a cultural heritage, friends and families and last not least inalienable dignity and rights;
- provide a space for further developing a coherent and binding body of international rights of migrants, based on ratification and effective transposition of key human rights instruments on migration, including ILO Conventions as well as the UN Convention on The Rights of All Migrant

Workers and the member of their families alongside with practical cooperation;

- carefully consider that different forms of transfers for development have different genesis and different purposes: while remittances are by definition privately owned, official development assistance (ODA) is an obligation of states. While remittances will in a first instance be of benefit to migrants and their families, ODA support will as a priority need to address the needs of the poorest of the poor, – often those who are not in a position to migrate-acknowledge the specific motivation and potential of diverse groups: refugees/ internally displaced persons and other uprooted people, labour migrants, persons migrating to join their family and develop targeted policies according to this diversity. This would include recognising their particular potential and vulnerability;
- foster initiatives which explore and encourage measures for synergies between migration and development policies, e.g. flexible visa regimes with multi-entry permits for circular migration, matching grants for remittances;
- recognize that only a situation of security and stability for migrants and their families in countries of origin and migration (e.g. secure residence status, right to property, safety respect for their physical and psychological integrity), will enable migrants to develop full potential as actors of development;
- take up the input from the Civil Society day and incorporate it into its conclusions.

IN ORDER TO FURTHER EXPLORE THE MIGRATION-DEVELOPMENT NEXUS, A FOLLOW UP PROCESS TO THE GFMD WILL

- need to elaborate a fuller process of preparation of governmental and civil society actors towards the forum, e.g. by the holding of joint regional fora of government and civil society before the global forum;
- need to look at a system of global governance on migration which respects rights of migrants, interests and policies of countries of immigration and emigration;
- need to look at policy coherence with other areas with considerable impact on migration and development, e.g. trade relations, agricultural policies, arms exports;
- have to provide evidence on gender specificities of the development impact of migration, e.g., the question if remittances of women migrants have a specific development impact and if they can be particularly supported in their development related activities;
- need to strengthen the role of the diaspora and migrant communities in shaping policies on migration and not only on development.

- **Statement from the public hearing on “The Changing Ecclesial Context: Impact of Migration on Living Together” issued by WCC and MECC, Beirut, Lebanon: 14–16 April 2008**

Migration is a fact of life. It is as much an instinct to survive as it is an inevitable consequence of globalization. We can neither turn our backs on it, nor control it. It will have decisive consequences for the world as we know it and a massive impact on the church and the ecumenical movement both at the local, regional and global levels. We need not, however, react with hysteria and fear. Migration is as much a part of who we are as it is a part of the history that has shaped us.

However, if states continue to speak only of ‘migration’ and not ‘migrants’, then migrants will continue to be exploited as nothing more than cheap labour for factories or slave labour for construction sites. If populist politicians and media outlets continue to brand migrants and refugees as ‘illegals’, ‘aliens’, ‘queue jumpers’ and ‘bogus’ asylum seekers, then migrants will continue to suffer from the racist, discriminatory and xenophobic undercurrents in every society. If we as churches only see migrants as victims, then we undermine their strengths and their resilience. If source countries only consider emigration as a loss – a brain drain – then migrants will be discouraged from returning and the potential ‘brain gain’ will be lost.

Lebanese representatives stressed the fact that the migration of Lebanon’s youth affects all Lebanese people and that to address the phenomena of Lebanon’s loss of educated youth, all facets of Lebanese society must come together to share their perspectives and articulate a vision for the future of Lebanon.

A reoccurring theme throughout the Hearing, and one that was keenly felt, was the impact of migration on the Christian presence in the Middle East.

Much of the public debate about migration is couched in terminology which is loaded and derogatory. People trying to enter another country are vilified as “illegal immigrants”, “gate-crashers”, “queue-jumpers”, and even as “invaders” seeking to breach the defences of a country with malicious intent. The clear implication is that they are “abusing the system” and “exploiting our generosity” and ought to be punished and deterred, with strong-armed politicians leading the public charge. But they also create the impression that migrants have no right to enter, and indeed, no rights at all, justifying harsh detention centres, deportations and the like. Adding to this, the September 11 attacks in the USA not only encouraged the demonising of migrants by labelling them as security threats, but also made it less likely that people will stick their neck out to defend migrants. Yet this demonization and scaremongering only perpetuates a vicious cycle, driving migrants back into their communities for protection, and making it harder for them to integrate.

Given their precarious legal position in the host country, irregular migrant workers easily fall prey to extortion and are highly vulnerable to abuse and exploitation by unscrupulous

employers, migration agents and labour brokers, corrupt bureaucrats and even criminal gangs. Those committing such abuses – including human traffickers, sweat shop and brothel owners – know that they will rarely be held to account as irregular migrants fear drawing official attention to themselves, as they may risk arrest or deportation, and are thus reluctant to turn to the authorities to enforce respect for their rights. Indeed, it is the very fact that irregular migrants are vulnerable and that perpetrators are unlikely to be held accountable that allows, and even encourages, the crime and corruption states wish to combat. The same crimes that are so commonly blamed on the presence of ‘foreigners’.

While we continue to only see the impact of migration in narrow terms, we will fail to come to grips with the economic potential of migrants; the role remittances play in supporting families, stabilising countries during emergencies, and providing the vital capital needed for developing economies.

Beyond hospitality, however, the churches must be a strong advocate and defender of the rights of people to move freely within their own nations and when driven by poverty, insecurity and persecution, to leave their homes in search of their God given right to life with dignity.

The church has a responsibility to ensure that public opinion is properly informed on the root causes of migration and the factors that force people to leave their homes. We must confront racism, discrimination and xenophobia wherever and whenever it manifests itself; in churches, in our communities and our nations.

Migrants are not commodities, illegal aliens or mere victims. They are human beings. Migrant rights are human rights. We must respect the human dignity of every migrant and give holistic consideration to their needs, their strengths and the economic, social and cultural contributions they make to society. Above all, we must stand in solidarity with migrants and migrant churches, accompany them and include them in the decision-making that effects and governs their lives.

Throughout this Hearing, participants were challenged by the complexities and sheer scale of migration, but they were heartened by the good will and common goals shared by Christian and Muslim leaders, and Lebanon’s Islamic and Christian communities. We call upon the churches to not only recognize the need to collaborate with other faiths, but were challenged to deepen and strengthen inter-faith dialogue and cooperation on migration.

- **Visits to nine country missions during the United Nations Advocacy Week to urge countries to sign and ratify the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families, 20 November 2008.**

Goal: One of the stated goals of UNAW was to provide opportunities for participants to undertake direct advocacy with Permanent Members States of the United Nations. This was the second year that the emphasis on advocacy was central to UNAW. In 2007, the UNAW planning team chose four themes, with particular attention on one of those themes as a primary focus for conducting advocacy: the Greater Horn of Africa. During UNAW 2008, the primary focus for advocacy was migration with an emphasis on all countries signing and ratifying the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families.

Thus far, only 39 countries have ratified this human rights instrument, and all of those countries are from the global south; not one “host” country in the so-called developed world has yet to ratify the Convention. An expert on migration issues and regional coordinator of the Migrant Forum Asia, Mr William Gois declared that "no other international convention shows such a split between developed and developing countries."

Throughout the week, participants took part in discussions about the threats to the human rights of migrants and the theological imperative to welcome strangers as well as practical measures which churches can take. In doing so, they prepared for the advocacy meetings with government representatives at various Permanent Member States’ Missions to the United Nations as well as representatives from United Nations agencies such as the office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. The UNAW planning team worked to ensure that participants met with at least one Mission in their region, and, where possible, with their own country.

Following expert formation on the issues surrounding migration, UNAW advocacy groups were organized in order to most effectively engage with country missions. Each group was led by an expert on migration from the Global Ecumenical Network on Migration (GEM) who worked with the group to strategically plan and prepare for the meeting. Each advocacy group carried forward the same advocacy message on migration. Grounded in the discussions of the GEM April 2008 meeting, the message was clear: “migrants are holistic beings created in the image of God.”

Missions were targeted based on the advocacy strategy. This strategy took into account whether the country was a “host” or “source” as well as whether it had ratified the convention. Each team emphasized that persons who migrate are not merely commodities, victims or ‘illegals’, but human beings with dignity, rights, dreams, strengths and contributions to make. In affirming these principles, the UNAW advocacy groups asked for:

- Ratification of core treaties
- Accountability under the law
- Accompaniment: vocal and visible migrants⁷
- Migration policies with human rights standards
- Respect for human rights defenders

The UNAW planning team contacted 27 missions and two United Nations agencies to request meetings regarding this advocacy strategy. The UN Member States included the following countries: Australia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Botswana, Bulgaria, Canada, Chile, France, Germany, India, Indonesia, Italy, Japan, Jordan, Mexico, Morocco, Mozambique, New Zealand, Philippines, Romania, South Africa, Sudan, Switzerland, Uganda, United Kingdom, United States of America, Zambia, and Zimbabwe. The two United Nations agencies included the IOM and the UNHCR.

The UNAW participants were granted meetings with only nine countries: Australia, Botswana, India, Jordan, Mozambique, Philippines, United States of America, Zambia, and Zimbabwe. An additional nine other countries outright said no to the meeting request, and the others did not respond (including the United Nations agencies). Each UNAW advocacy group was assigned one country mission to prepare for and meet with to discuss and present the advocacy task.

- **Press release at the end of a meeting of representatives from African, European and migrant churches at the African and European churches' consultation on migration and the changing ecclesial landscape, Palermo, Italy, 24 November 2008**

The release was jointly issued by the World Council of Churches, All Africa Council of Churches, the Churches' Commission for Migrants in Europe and the Federazione delle Chiese Evangeliche in Italia

Dealing with migration means giving a human face to the church

“Diversity is not a problem but it has to be perceived as *the kairos* for the churches in their common efforts towards unity”, affirmed Rev. Fidele Mushidi from Frankfurt/Main (Germany) during the African and European churches' consultation on migration and the changing ecclesial landscape in Palermo from the 2th to the 23rd November 2008.

Representatives from African, European and migrant churches met for the first time and were able to discuss on an equal level experiences and responsibilities related to changes in the churches due to migration. “For us as Christians the destiny of immigrants is essential because it is at the heart of Christian experience.” Bishop AboagyeMensah stated.

“A holistic approach to the issue of migration and integration is a necessity in order to have an entirely inclusive community,” Paolo Naso from the Federation of Protestant Churches in Italy explained. Church experiences from different countries were shared providing different approaches to uniting in diversity. While migration and diversity in the public and political debate are considered more as an obstacle for societal cohesion, the consultation stressed the churches view that diversity offers new opportunities for renewal and sustainable societies.

In the same line the consultation discussed how migration is affecting the self-understanding of the church: “a Church of strangers and sojourners will understand itself as a church of people on the move in which the otherness is not a motive for exclusion but source of mutual growing in recognition and respect of the diverse versions of Christianity” said Amélé Ekué.

The consultation strongly recommended continuing reflection and enhancing cooperation between the churches to respond to the ecumenical calling of being the Church together.

PEACE AND DISARMAMENT

Disarmament

- **Statement of WCC general secretary on the agreement reached at the Six Party Talks, 15 February 2007**

The World Council of Churches, since the early 1980s, has monitored developments relating to peace and security in North East Asia. Of particular concern to the Council was the division of Korea and the consequential tension and the potential threat of conflict in the peninsula.

It was in this background that the 9th October 2006, testing of nuclear device by the Democratic Peoples’ Republic of Korea (DPRK), prompted a quick response from the WCC that amongst others called for the international community to put nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation firmly back on track. This was consistent with the August 2004, executive committee statement that called on DPRK to abandon all uranium enrichment and plutonium extraction programmes. The statement also called for lifting of sanctions against DPRK and urged that due consideration be given to its security concerns.

The agreement reached on 13th February, at the Six Party Talks in Beijing, in which Pyongyang pledged to close its nuclear facilities in Yongbyon, in return for nuclear fuel, is a major breakthrough in efforts to restore peace and normalcy in the region. The breakthrough vindicates WCC long standing policy of engagement and dialogue to resolve tension and conflict in North East Asia. The agreement produced a sixty-day timetable under which DPRK will take initial steps towards denuclearization in return for energy and economic aid.

The World Council of Churches welcomes the agreement as it reaffirms WCC’s conviction that conflict flash points can be more effectively addressed regionally. It is recognition that regional mechanisms and common security systems need to be

encouraged. It is now imperative for the Six Party states and the international community to closely monitor the progress during the sixty-day timetable that has been set for implementation of the condition imposed on the parties and to ensure the momentum of the talks.

The Presbyterian Church in the Republic of Korea, a member of the WCC fellowship also welcomed the agreement and urged: “the Six Party states to develop a concrete road map for the denuclearization of the Korea peninsula and for the normalization of diplomatic relations between DPRK and the United States and between DPRK and Japan”. It has called on the South Korean government to play a key role in these efforts.

- **Statement on cluster munitions adopted by WCC central committee, Geneva, Switzerland, 13–20 February, 2008**

“Do not be deceived; God is not mocked, for you reap whatever you sow.” (Gal. 6:7)

1. These words of wisdom from Scripture serve as a warning in a new context today. The verse sheds moral light on a modern weapon of war, an indiscriminate instrument that confounds the intentions of its users and brings terrible consequences to its victims. As Christians we live in the light of God’s promise that swords will be beaten into ploughshares, spears into pruning hooks, and that people shall not “learn war” any more (Isaiah 2:4). Within this broad mandate to overcome violence, the use of cluster munitions presents a particularly urgent challenge. Designed for the heat of battle, cluster munitions strike and strike when war is over; scattered in combat in an instant, cluster bombs reap a deadly harvest for decades; conceived to stop massed soldiers and tanks, these weapons mostly kill civilians one by one. We hear reports of a nun in Serbia who picked up bomblets scattered in a field and innocently brought them to her convent; of a Lebanese man who put his child in a tree for safety because of bomblets on the ground, only to have a bomblet in the tree kill the boy as the father went for help; of a Laotian mother who died in her garden from one of the millions of bomblets strewn across her country in a war before she was born.
2. Cluster munitions have been used in some 35 countries and regions since World War II including Iraq, Kuwait, Afghanistan, Chechnya, the former Yugoslavia, Angola, Cambodia and Vietnam. In the 2006 war in Israel and Lebanon, some four million cluster bomblets were dropped on southern Lebanon. The United Nations estimates that one million did not explode and that two-thirds of these are scattered in populated areas. Fully 98 percent of the casualties caused by cluster munitions are civilians.
3. A cluster munition is a weapon with multiple explosive sub-munitions which are dispensed from a container. The sub-munitions (bomblets) are scattered in order to kill and injure human beings over a wide area. They are designed to detonate in the air or on the ground, but large numbers fail to explode, leaving a deadly post-conflict legacy for local children, women and men.

4. About 75 countries possess cluster munitions. The sub-munitions in their stockpiles number in the billions, many old and unreliable. Until recently, governments had not taken concerted action to address either the prevalence of cluster munitions or the problems caused by their use. However, the massive and indiscriminate use of cluster munitions at the end of the war in southern Lebanon, after a ceasefire had been agreed, stirred worldwide concern. It served as a tragic catalyst for common action. International awareness of the need to deal with cluster munitions began to grow. More than 80 states and 250 non-governmental organizations have now joined a fast-track process to negotiate a treaty on cluster munitions during 2008. The proposed treaty would prohibit some or all cluster munitions, provide assistance to survivors, help affected communities and require clearance of contaminated land.
5. We believe that cluster munitions must be eliminated because their use causes indiscriminate civilian casualties. These wide-area weapons do not meet the two most important obligations of international humanitarian law to protect civilians during armed conflict: 1) the need to distinguish between civilians and combatants and 2) the need to avoid civilian losses that are out of proportion to direct military gains. Cluster munitions pose severe risks to civilian lives at the time of use and for decades afterward. They also have long-term impacts on peace operations, post-conflict rehabilitation and civilian livelihoods.
6. The calls for certain technical exemptions from a ban are not convincing: Self-destruct mechanisms reduce the number of unexploded bomblets but are still subject to failure themselves, especially under field conditions. Lowering the rate of duds to even one percent still creates unacceptable levels of lethal and dangerous contamination in the targeted area. One percent of a million bomblets is 10,000 bomblets. Neither fix addresses the indiscriminate and disproportionate aspects of initial use. Technical solutions also do not remedy the humanitarian and moral problems inherent in cluster weapons use. What is required is a treaty that applies to all cluster munitions without exception.

Accordingly, and with a view to the so-called “Oslo Process” of negotiating a cluster munition treaty this year, the central committee of the World Council of Churches, meeting in Geneva, Switzerland, 13–20 February 2008:

- A. **Condemns** the use of cluster munitions;
- B. **Supports** the development of a legally binding international treaty to ban the use, production, stockpiling and transfer of cluster munitions, and to require assistance to survivors, help for affected communities and clearance of contaminated land;
- C. **Commends** the governments who have promoted and led the current Oslo Process on cluster munitions, including the governments of Norway, Peru, Austria, New Zealand and Ireland; and **urges** non-participating governments, including the United

States, Russia, China, India, Israel and Pakistan, to join and support this timely multilateral arms control and humanitarian initiative;

- D. *Commends* the cluster munitions control work of the International Committee of the Red Cross and of civil society groups in the Cluster Munition Coalition, noting that the coalition includes various member churches of the WCC and church-related organizations;
- E. *Encourages* member churches of the WCC to become informed about the issue of cluster munitions and the current process to achieve a cluster munition treaty;
- F. *Recommends* that member churches join the international church concern for an effective cluster munition treaty and urge their governments to actively support the treaty process.

- **Comment made by WCC general secretary on the occasion of a multilateral agreement banning the use of cluster munitions reached in Dublin by 110 governments, 28 May 2008**

Churches around the world are much encouraged by the fact that 110 governments have been able to agree on how cluster munitions can be banned. Just three months ago the World Council of Churches central committee affirmed this joint endeavour with civil society and now the terms of a solid treaty are already on the table.

In conflict areas, assistance is one step closer for civilians who have been maimed by these indiscriminate weapons and for people who must live where cluster bombs have been used. A cluster bomb ban will save lives in future as well.

We also applaud the fact that the meeting in Dublin was part of a multilateral plan to tackle a difficult disarmament issue. Success now raises international expectations of powerful governments that have not been at the negotiating table. A broad consensus is emerging around a higher standard of behaviour very much in keeping with the rule of law. We look forward to even more states signing the new Cluster Munitions Convention when it opens for signature in Oslo later this year.

There is a biblical promise in the book of Isaiah that people shall not "learn war" any more, as the WCC statement last February noted. The banning of cluster bombs would be an excellent example of unlearning one type of warfare in our day.

Rev. Dr Samuel Kobia
General secretary

- **Public comment on the signing of the Cluster Munitions Convention in Oslo by WCC general secretary, 3 December 2008**

A solid majority of the world's governments today sign a treaty to ban cluster munitions, a type of weapon that kills people indiscriminately and over a wide area. We congratulate the more than 100 countries in Oslo to sign the Convention on Cluster Munitions and the coalition of more than 300 civil society groups including churches that have helped the international community move to resolve a long-standing problem.

The Convention on Cluster Munitions is a humane and historic victory. It sets new standards for disarmament treaties and international humanitarian law by banning a whole class of weapon and requiring specific assistance for the victims of the weapon.

Lives and limbs will be spared wherever the treaty is implemented. It will reduce new casualties as old unexploded weapons are cleared and make civilians less vulnerable in future conflict zones where this random killer is not used. To sign such a treaty on the International Day of Persons with Disabilities is highly appropriate.

Every government that implements this Oslo treaty puts constructive pressure on states that have not signed, including the United States, Russia, China, India, Pakistan, Israel and Zimbabwe. We reiterate the need for those states to sign and support this timely arms control and humanitarian initiative, as the World Council of Churches central committee requested in February this year.

Meanwhile, we commend the many groups including church-related organizations that support the clearance of millions of left-over explosives in the 30 countries where cluster munitions have been used in the Middle East, Asia, Africa and Europe. We encourage governments that must now begin the monumental task of destroying existing stocks held by 75 countries.

Rev. Dr Samuel Kobia
WCC general secretary

- **Oral intervention of the Geneva NGO Committee for Disarmament at a civil society session of the UN Conference on Disarmament, on “New Cooperation in the CD: Doing What Our Times Demand”, 8 September 2009**

Mr President, Distinguished Delegates,

First, I would like to congratulate all members of the CD for the successful adoption of the Programme of Work for 2009, on the 29th of May. In light of this adoption, the NGO Committee for Disarmament is pleased to make a contribution to the work of the CD for

the first time in accordance with the decision taken during the 946th plenary on NGO Participation. We have asked for the floor today to highlight some ways that NGOs are already contributing to the work of the CD especially in regard to the four core issues, to express our joy that the decade of deadlock finally ended and our hope that the current impasse will be overcome so the Conference can start negotiating early next year.

I'm taking the floor as the president of the Geneva NGO Committee for Disarmament. The Committee facilitates and supports coordination and cooperation between civil society, NGOs, and the UN on peace and disarmament initiatives. For over thirty-five years, the NGO Committee for Disarmament has played an important role in raising awareness in civil society and among NGOs worldwide on the status of negotiations, country positions, major obstacles and opportunities, and has helped NGOs to transmit their expertise and creative proposals to the appropriate decision-making fora. The committee is currently comprised of NGOs, both in Geneva and beyond who work on issues of peace and security. We are one of the substantive committees of the Conference of NGOs in Consultative Relationship with the UN (CONGO).

The world reacted positively to the news of the adoption of the Programme of Work. Heads of State, major news outlets and civil society around the globe expressed the hope that soon the CD would again be what it was designed to be: the sole permanent multilateral negotiating forum for disarmament. The sixty-five members of this body have been given the right to keep their national security interests paramount during disarmament negotiations. However, as the CD is not a universal body, the members also bear the responsibility to negotiate on behalf of all member states, for the security of the world. As the Conference revitalizes its work, the interest and energy of civil society to engage will continue to increase.

UN Secretary General Ban Ki Moon said in Davos this year that "Our times demand a new definition of leadership – global leadership. They demand a new constellation of international cooperation – governments, civil society and the private sector, working together for a collective global good." This presentation is meant to serve as a demonstration of ways that this new “constellation of international cooperation” can further our shared goals. We are not starting with empty hands as the CD begins negotiations. The foundations for this cooperation have already been laid for negotiating a fissile materials treaty and engaging in substantive discussions around negative security assurances, the prevention of an arms race in outer space and nuclear disarmament.

A fissile materials treaty

A fissile materials treaty has been recognized for a long time as the next logical step. When the decade of deadlock was broken on 29 May, not a single delegation objected to this negotiation as the next step towards nuclear disarmament.

The documents that have been submitted by governments to the Conference in relation to this potential treaty have been compiled on the UNOG website. This is an excellent resource and we'd like to thank the secretariat for putting this together. It is unfortunate however that the civil society contributions towards this work, including model treaties

submitted to the secretariat for circulation to the conference have not been included. If they were, you would find a model treaty created by the International Panel on Fissile Materials as well as one drafted by Greenpeace International. While these may not be agreeable to all states, and are likely not ready for adoption as they are, they are demonstrable contributions from civil society towards furthering the efforts in this chamber.

Not only has civil society contributed by submitting model treaties, but there have been a series of seminars this year on this agreed next step towards nuclear disarmament. To briefly refresh your memory, on 25 May, the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) held an intensive day long discussion on technological advances towards verifying a fissile materials treaty. Additionally, the International Panel on Fissile Materials delivered a series of presentations in this very chamber just a few weeks ago on 7 August.

This demonstration of civil society support for the efforts that go on in this room illustrate both how much the world is relying on the Conference and how ready we are to contribute with new ideas and out of the box thinking.

Prevention of an arms race in outer space

While negotiations on fissile materials have been identified as the next logical step towards nuclear disarmament, the long and difficult journey toward taking this step teaches a critical lesson. *Re-capturing* an old nuclear genie like fissile materials and forcing it back into its 'bottle' is difficult and dangerous. It is much easier, safer and wiser to *prevent* new nuclear genies from getting out of the bottle in the first place. Preventing the weaponization of space is a case in point. Doing what needs to be done now is much smarter than letting this issue get out of control so we have to clean up another mess later. To let space weapons develop and proliferate is to repeat the dangerous pattern of nuclear history. As the representative from Bangladesh said on 3 February "Outer space is the common heritage of humankind. It must be used for peaceful purposes only. The CD must take on the issue of adopting an international instrument for averting the weaponization of space."

The role of the private sector in particular needs to be thoroughly examined and an internationally legally binding instrument is the only way to guarantee the protection of both private and national space assets.

Imagine for a moment two competing satellite companies, both having an increasing market share and seeking ways to dominate the market, to dominate space. To do this, they realize that they can easily knock their competitors out of orbit, they can use either earth based or space based weapons to do it, and they do. The resultant debris then pushes countless weather satellites out of orbit, as a result early warning signs for horrific weather conditions are not received and countless people lose their lives and livelihoods. With the conclusion of a treaty preventing the weaponization of space, this scenario can be avoided. Only when this treaty considers the varying obligations and

needs of both space-faring nations and the corporations operating in space will it truly protect space for all.

Earlier today, Ambassador Grinius introduced the report from this year's UNIDIR Seminar. These annual space seminars are a substantive and solid contribution towards the protection of space. There other civil society proposals towards new space treaties that differ from the Chinese and Russian proposed PPWT. These include, but are not limited to:

1. **A treaty banning space debris-creating weapons.** Such a treaty, while not completely barring ASATs or space weapons, would make a very useful contribution towards addressing some of the most egregious negative repercussions of space weapons; and might open the way for the militaries of space-faring powers to pursue space control missions in a 'controlled' manner that would protect civil assets even during wartime. This idea was put forward by Ms. Theresa Hitchens in "Safeguarding Space: Building Cooperative Norms to Dampen Negative Trends," *Disarmament Diplomacy* 81 (Winter 2005)
2. **Treaty on common security in outer space (CSO-Treaty).** The basis for this treaty comes from the work of Dr Detlev Wolter, and was elaborated at a joint conference held by Russia, China, UN Institute for Disarmament Research, and The Simons Centre for Disarmament and Non-Proliferation Research in March 2005.
3. **Space preservation treaty.** The Space Preservation Treaty is a proposal developed for the international community by the Institute for Cooperation in Space. Drawing upon resolutions passed by the UN General Assembly and various aspects of the Outer Space Treaty, it calls for the banning of space-based weapons in order to maintain the peaceful use of outer space for the benefit of all countries. This treaty would seem in effect to ban all weapons designed to damage orbiting satellites, not merely prohibiting the deployment of weapons in space. Also, it calls for an end to research and development of space-based weapon systems.

The role both of NGOs and of the space industry, in the discussions of the prevention of the weaponization of space cannot be emphasized enough. NGOs have provided independent information, analysis and expertise on space security issues. The industry is already operating in a multilateral way, and is decreasingly attached to individual governments. In space there are many constellations and never has it been more evident that we must develop the constellation of cooperation the Secretary General talked about.

Negative security assurances

The right to not be attacked by a nuclear weapon, especially if you have honestly and in good faith decided not to make such weapons, is a relatively straightforward demand. However, the issue of legally binding negative security assurances has not been so easily dealt with. Part of the challenge has been the reliance on nuclear weapons in

national security strategies, and in the security strategies of cold war alliances, like NATO. Another part of the challenge are the rarely discussed positive security assurances that some states are offered.

When examining this debate the framework itself should be questioned. Dr Rebecca Johnson of the Acronym Institute did this most clearly in Issue #90 of Disarmament Diplomacy, published earlier this year.

Drohson noted in her article *“Towards 2010 and Beyond, Security Assurances for Everyone: A New Approach to Deterring the Use of Nuclear Weapons ”* that “[t]he problem with the traditional approaches on security assurances is that they ... still treat the five NPT-recognized NWS as both primary threat and primary source of assistance.” She goes on to say that the step “that should now be pursued by everyone – is to recognize in law the widely accepted fact that any use of nuclear weapons would be a crime against humanity.” This could be built up by unilateral declarations by courageous leaders, and then codified through possible Security Council action or modification of the 1998 Rome Statute establishing the International Criminal Court.

The approach advocated by Dr Johnson goes further than UNSCRs 255 and 984. This approach helps to reduce the role of nuclear weapons in national and regional security strategies. If using nuclear weapons is not only morally reprehensible, but also illegal, then there is also an opportunity to hold suppliers and traffickers to account as well as governments and state and non-state leaders if they are ever used. As the nuclear posture of the United States is currently under review, and the security strategy of NATO is also being reviewed, the time is ripe to devalue nuclear weapons in every security strategy. Making their use illegal would have a multiplier effect in this regard.

A colleague recently said “it’s time to close up the nuclear umbrella and let the sun shine in”. Making the use of nuclear weapons illegal reduces their credibility as a deterrent and goes a long way to assure states that do not have these weapons that they will be safe from a nuclear nightmare.

Nuclear disarmament

NGOs and other members of civil society have been advocating for nuclear disarmament ever since the first nuclear weapon was exploded over Alamogordo, New Mexico in July 1945. Countless presentations, seminars and side events are organized in the margins of each NPT Preparatory Committee and Review Conference Meeting. Dozens of seminars and discussions at different levels on ways to engage both governments and other actors, including the media, with a view to creating a world free of nuclear weapons take place every year.

One of the most substantive contributions from the civil society sector on this issue in recent years has been the release of “Securing our Survival: The Case for a Nuclear Weapons Convention”. In his five point plan for nuclear disarmament, the UN Secretary General recognized that nuclear weapons states could pursue the goal of nuclear disarmament “by agreement on a framework of separate, mutually reinforcing

instruments. Or they could consider negotiating a nuclear-weapons convention". This is not a new idea in this Chamber. On 12 February of this year Algeria, speaking on behalf of the Group of 21 said the G21 "reaffirms its readiness to start negotiations on a phased programme for the complete elimination of nuclear weapons with a specified framework of time, including a nuclear weapons convention." On 8 May 2009, a reference to such a convention made an appearance in Chairman Chidyausiku's masterful first draft of the NPT Preparatory Committee's final document. It did not survive the weekend but few will forget it was there. On 29 May, after the adoption of the programme of work, India noted that on "26 September 2008, our Prime Minister reiterated India's proposal for a Nuclear Weapons Convention for banning the production, development, stock piling and use of nuclear weapons and to provide for their complete elimination within a specified time frame."

The NGO and academic communities are ready, willing and eager to support these negotiations and indeed all disarmament negotiations. We recognize that the CD has finally managed to dig itself out of a deep rut. We applaud the fact that it is back on firm ground again. But, like a car negotiating a rough road, it's easy for the CD to slip back into the rut again. This year, after many years, you have managed to climb out. We implore you to stick to solid ground and get on with the work. Cooperation is solid ground. Cooperation is where you can avoid bargaining over positions, as positions are not negotiable, but rather focus on interests, which define the problem. Progress there is possible, even normal. As the Secretary General urged us, "Our times demand...a new constellation of cooperation – between governments, civil society and the private sector." We urge you to move swiftly to adopt a programme of work in 2010 so that negotiations in this chamber can begin in earnest. Let's let a year of cooperation reverse a decade of deadlock.

Thank you.

Peace

- **International ecumenical conference on "Forgiveness, peace and reconciliation" exploring Christian thought and contributions to peace, reconciliation and forgiveness, Volos, Greece, 17-20 May 2007**

Christian scholars from Europe and US will discuss peace, justice and security and how they relate to religion, spirituality and healing at an international ecumenical conference on "Forgiveness, peace and reconciliation" to be held 17-20 May 2007 in Volos, Greece. The current situations in Cyprus, Serbia, Russia, Ireland and the Middle East will be amongst case studies considered in a conference section on "Orthodoxy in situations of conflict".

A broad spectrum of distinguished theologians, scholars and academics, ecumenists, members of peace and reconciliation fellowships from the Orthodox, Roman Catholic, Anglican and Protestant traditions will participate in the conference, which is being jointly sponsored by the Volos Academy for Theological Studies, the Boston Theological Institute – an ecumenical consortium of Orthodox, Roman Catholic, and Protestant theological schools, seminaries, and university divinity schools – and the World Council of Churches (WCC). The Church of Greece hosts the conference as its contribution to the WCC's Decade to Overcome Violence, whose annual focus this year is on Europe.

In their presentations, speakers will be looking at various aspects of the over-arching theme. After opening lectures on "The call to overcome violence," they will explore such topics as the interrelationships between peace, justice and security; war in the name of religion; spiritual resources for a culture of peace; identity and "otherness"; and healing of memories.

Panel speakers from Cyprus, Serbia, Russia and the Middle East will discuss "Orthodoxy in situations of conflict"; members of the Orthodox Peace Fellowship, the St Egidio Community in Rome, the Interreligious Dialogue Centre (Serbia) and the Centre for Contemporary Christianity in Ireland will participate in a concluding round table on "Christian churches contributing to a culture of peace".

- **Observation of International Day of Prayer for Peace, 21 September 2007**

Christians around the world to pray for peace on 21 September

This coming 21 September Christians from Congo to the US, and from Colombia to Switzerland to South Korea will join in prayers during the International Day of Prayer for Peace.

On that day, women at the Socopao Limete Presbyterian Church in the Democratic Republic of Congo – a country where a five-year war has claimed an estimated three million lives – will meet for fasting and prayer. They will not be alone. The congregation of the First Christian Church in Shelbyville, Indiana, US, will, too, pray for peace on that day.

In Colombia, the Ecumenical Network and the Evangelical Council of Colombia are planning to participate in the initiative. So do a small ecumenical prayer community of sisters in Switzerland and congregations belonging to the peace fellowship of the Presbyterian Church of the Republic of Korea.

These are but a few examples of how Christian communities worldwide are responding to the WCC's invitation to celebrate an International Day of Prayer for Peace on 21 September or the Sunday preceding or following it.

For 2007, the WCC office for the Decade to Overcome Violence (DOV) has made available prayer and liturgical resources developed in the context of this year's DOV focus on Europe and its theme "Make me an instrument of your peace".

The initiative was first proposed at a 2004 meeting between WCC General Secretary Rev. Dr Samuel Kobia and the then UN Secretary General Kofi Annan. The WCC's invitation to pray for peace on 21 September coincides with the United Nations International Day of Peace.

- **Consultation on “Healing of Memories – Reconciling Communities”, Dublin, Ireland, 1-4 October 2007**

Dublin consultation to explore ways to heal memories of large-scale crimes

The bloody conflict in Northern Ireland, the crimes committed under the apartheid regime in South Africa and under communist rule in eastern Germany, mass killings perpetrated by the Khmer Rouge in Cambodia or by the Guatemalan military during a 35 year long civil war: the diverse cases of these nations and their struggles to cope with the legacies of massive human rights violations are at the heart of the 1-4 October ecumenical consultation "Healing of Memories – Reconciling Communities" in Dublin, Ireland, co-organized by the World Council of Churches (WCC) and the Irish School of Ecumenics.

Some thirty international academics and reconciliation practitioners will gather at the Dominican retreat centre Tallaght, Dublin. Drawing on the five case studies, the ecumenical consultation will assess best practices and seek to establish a summary or manual that would help churches, civil society groups and policy makers to understand the needs and options of community healing.

The five cases tell a tale of how memories of past injustices can haunt communities for decades. These memories "continue to influence the lives and policies of societies in negative or positive manners depending on the ways in which they are being dealt with," says Dr Geiko Müller-Fahrenholz, the coordinator of the WCC's International Ecumenical Peace Convocation (IEPC). The consultation "Healing of Memories – Reconciling Communities" is part of the preparatory process leading up to the IEPC in 2011.

Communities affected by violence are often marked by the partiality and selectivity of memories. In this context, Dr Manoj Kurian, WCC programme executive for health and healing, calls to mind the literal meaning of the English verb 'to remember': "It speaks of the act of putting together those 'members' that have been dis-membered. 'Healing' has to do with overcoming the damaging effects of 'dismemberment'."

- **Participation of WCC general secretary in panel discussion on “Faiths, War and Peace”, Naples, Italy, 23 October 2007**

WCC takes part in interfaith dialogue for peace

At a high-profile interfaith dialogue for peace in Naples, Italy, earlier this week, gathered religious and political leaders and intellectuals from five continents. The event which was called "For a world without violence" was organized by the Catholic community of Sant'Egidio and included a eucharistic celebration conducted by Pope Benedict XVI on Sunday, 21 October.

In a panel discussion held Tuesday morning about "Faiths, war and peace," Rev. Dr Samuel Kobia, WCC general secretary, said he sees "three major threats to world peace today," namely: nuclear proliferation accompanied by "intense struggles for resources in an increasingly polarized world and the gradual weakening of the global institutions of mutual accountability"; "the increasing impact of climate change"; and "the threat of deepening injustices at all levels".

Kobia also emphasized the positive role religion can play in such a context: "Faith communities are not defined along racial or ethnic lines, or by national borders, but cut across these divides. We can therefore help to find new ways to express our faith, to be able to talk to our neighbours of other faiths, and to forge common visions and goals for the sake of life," he affirmed.

The event echoes a decade-long peace initiative of the WCC, the Decade to Overcome Violence. This effort to focus churches on the issue of violence and peacemaking ends in 2011 with an International Ecumenical Peace Convocation.

Among the personalities attending the Naples event were the chief rabbi of Israel Yona Metzger, the founder of the University of the United Arab Emirates Ezzeddin Ibrahim, and the Buddhist monk U. Uttara from Myanmar, as well as the Italian premier Romano Prodi and the presidents of Tanzania, Jakaya Mrisho Kikwete, and Ecuador, Rafael Correa Delgado.

Signs of goodwill among religions and denominations at the Naples meetings included a relic of Saint Andrew being handed over to the Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew. It is believed that the larger part of St. Andrew's remains were taken from Constantinople in the early 13th century and brought to Amalfi in southern Italy.

- **Presentation of WCC general secretary “Can churches be peacemakers in a world racked by violence?”, Washington DC, USA, 16 December 2007**

Be "leaders in peace", WCC invites churches

Can churches be peace-makers in a world racked by violence? This is the question to be addressed by World Council of Churches (WCC) general secretary Rev. Dr Samuel Kobia at the Washington National Cathedral, Washington DC, on Sunday, 16 December 2007.

"For too long the church has been a willing participant in the violence of the world", Kobia said in an interview recently. "Christ has called the church to be a peace-maker and a reconciler. This is not just a message for the season, but one the church must take to heart if it is going to truly minister to the world. The church must be a leader in peace."

Kobia will be the guest at the Cathedral "Sunday Forum", a 50-minute discussion hosted by Dean Samuel T. Lloyd III and open to questions from the public. Addressing "critical issues in the light of faith", the forum takes place every Sunday in the nave at 10 am, prior to the 11:15 am service, and is webcast live on the Cathedral website (see below).

Kobia is visiting the US from 12-18 December. His schedule in Washington DC includes a two-day retreat with heads of churches and an encounter with young ecumenical leaders (15 December).

On 18 December in New York City, Kobia will be guest of a Pan-Orthodox gathering hosted by Archbishop Vicken Aykazian, of the Armenian Orthodox Church of America, a member of the WCC executive committee and the president of the US National Council of Churches.

An outstanding expression of WCC's commitment to peace-making is the Council's Decade to Overcome Violence (DOV) 2001-2010. A global church movement that strengthens existing efforts and networks for overcoming violence, and inspires the creation of new ones, the DOV is to achieve its culmination at an International Ecumenical Peace Convocation to be held in May 2011.

In the three years prior to the convocation, international ecumenical teams called Living Letters are visiting churches around the world exploring how they are addressing peace-making in their context. This past September a Living Letters team visited several locations in the U.S., while in August another team visited Sri Lanka. Some forty additional visits around the world by Living Letters teams are to take place over the next three years.

- **Observation of the International Day of Prayer for Peace, 21 September 2008**

In growing numbers, churches pray for peace on 21 September

Nearly 140 congregations and Christian groups in the United States are organizing public prayer events on the International Day of Prayer for Peace, on 21 September. Another

grouping of churches from different countries around the world has committed to observe the day with a 24-hour prayer chain.

These are but two examples of the growing popularity of the International Day of Prayer for Peace, which is observed on 21 September. Since its launch by the World Council of Churches (WCC) in 2004, the day is an opportunity for churches worldwide to pray and act together to nurture lasting peace in the hearts of people, their families, communities and societies.

This year, the campaign for the day of prayer carried out by On Earth Peace, a US-based agency rooted in the Church of the Brethren, has mobilized nearly 140 congregations to hold public prayer events. Congregations are encouraged to bring together groups of people in their community to focus on the ways in which violence is affecting them.

"Our hope is that participating congregations intentionally build new or deeper ecumenical and interfaith relationships at the local level, so they are in a strengthened position for addressing violence in their communities on a more ongoing basis," says Matt Guynn, the group's Peace Witness coordinator.

Also on 21 September, nine countries from the Pacific, Europe and North America regions will be linked in a 24-hour prayer chain. Prayer events will be hosted by churches in American Samoa, Canada, Fiji, Indonesia, New Zealand, Norway, Samoa, Tuvalu and the United States.

The idea of the International Day of Prayer for Peace was proposed in 2004 during a meeting between WCC general secretary Samuel Kobia and then UN Secretary General Kofi Annan. It is celebrated on September 21 (or the closest Sunday), coinciding with the UN International Day of Peace. The day of prayer is one of the initiatives of the WCC's Decade to Overcome Violence (DOV).

For 2008, prayer and liturgical resources developed in the context of this year's DOV focus on the Pacific region and its theme "Witnessing to God's Peace" have been made available.

- **Public hearing on reconciliation held at the WCC headquarters highlighting the contribution and role of churches in reconciliation processes around the world, 19 February 2009**

Reconciliation requires truth, justice and forgiveness, ecumenical panel says

The contribution and role of churches in reconciliation processes around the world were highlighted by an international ecumenical panel of experts at a public hearing held in Geneva, Switzerland, on 19 February.

Taking place in the context of the 16-20 February meeting of the World Council of Churches (WCC) executive committee, the discussion was the first in a series of WCC-sponsored contributions to the UN International Year of Reconciliation, which is being marked in 2009.

In view of the multiple and convergent crises affecting the world today, the prophetic voice of the churches is sorely needed, said Fr Miguel d'Escoto Brockman in a video message opening the presentations. D'Escoto, who is the president of the 63rd session of the UN general assembly, said that Christians need to speak out in clear prophetic language because those crises are rooted in a more fundamental moral crisis.

While truth is an obvious precondition for reconciliation, reconciliation is in turn a precondition for lasting peace, said Rev. Kjell Magne Bondevik, who chaired the panel. However Bondevik, who is the moderator of the WCC Commission of the Churches on International Affairs, stressed the dilemma that societies often face between justice on the one hand and peace on the other.

For Rev. Dr Setri Nyomi, general secretary of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches, there is no possible choice between justice and peace as the latter cannot be achieved without the former. Nyomi highlighted the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission and the Interreligious Council of Liberia as exemplary faith-based contributions to healing and reconciliation. Today, he said, churches face the challenge of reconciling societies fragmented as a result of a greed-driven global economic system.

Archbishop Silvano Tomasi, the Vatican's permanent observer to the UN in Geneva, stressed the role of forgiveness – a transformative inner change of the person – in reconciliation processes. Highlighting that the word "forgiveness" is not even mentioned in the UN general assembly resolution declaring 2009 the International Year of Reconciliation, Tomasi affirmed forgiveness' critical role in reconciliation. It opens doors to possibilities that politics alone cannot reach, he said.

The concrete experience of churches involved in reconciliation processes across a religious divide in Indonesia's Moluccas islands was shared by Rev. Dr Margaretha Hendriks-Ririmasse, vice-moderator of the WCC central committee. At the beginning of the 1999-2004 conflict between Christian and Muslim populations in the region, churches did not know what to do, she said. But they reacted quickly and together with Muslim communities were able to tap into a long tradition of mutual help and cooperation.

- **Meeting on “Peace Ethics in Orthodoxy” in preparation for the International Ecumenical Peace Convocation, 29 June-3 July 2009**

Peace ethics debated by experts from both strands of Orthodoxy

A recent international consultation in Bucharest, Romania, saw representatives from 12 Eastern and Oriental Orthodox churches debate on the teaching and practice of Orthodox ethics on peace.

"The world we live in is, certainly, a world of the affirmation of the desire of domination over other people, in all fields of human life," Romanian Orthodox Patriarch Daniel said as he welcomed the participants to the Patriarchal Palace.

"Faced with such negative attitudes, Christians are called to fight against the selfish passions, such as greed, wish of domination, fury and violence, through prayer and fasting, education and dialogue, reconciliation and cooperation in humanitarian and social actions, attitudes and actions that restore to man the value of being created in the image of the merciful, peaceful and people loving God," the patriarch added.

"We saw a remarkable variety of perceptions regarding the concept of peace in different cultural and national contexts such as Russia, Greece, Armenia, Ethiopia, India, the United States and Egypt," Fr Prof. Daniel Buda, World Council of Churches (WCC) programme executive for the Coordination of Church and Ecumenical Relations said after the consultation.

The 29 June to 3 July consultation on "Peace Ethics in Orthodoxy" was co-organized by the Institute for Theology and Peace (Hamburg, Germany), the WCC, the Institute for Peace Studies in Eastern Christianity (Boston, USA) and the Patriarchate of the Romanian Orthodox Church, which hosted the meeting.

The meeting was one in a series of expert consultations in advance of the International Ecumenical Peace Convocation, which will be organized by the WCC in Kingston, Jamaica, 17 to 25 May 2011.

The papers presented during the consultation by theologians and historians on how the Orthodox churches understand Jesus Christ's message of peace will be published by the WCC in the coming months.

- **Public statement on the occasion of the 60th anniversary of the Geneva Conventions, 12 August 2009**

60 years ago today, on 12 August 1949, the international community adopted the Geneva Conventions which aimed at limiting the devastating effects of war by protecting people not actively taking part in armed conflicts. Today, 194 countries in the world have ratified the Geneva Conventions and their Additional Protocols which still provide the most relevant framework for protecting civilians and sick, wounded or captured combatants. The overwhelming support for these measures from all countries in the world shows that the Geneva Conventions have played a significant role in war and conflicts over the past six decades.

The commemoration of the 60th anniversary of the Geneva Conventions provides an occasion to verify the extent to which their moral authority and standards are recognized and respected in contemporary situations of war and conflict. Although the Geneva Conventions make clear distinctions between civilians and combatants, civil and military targets, the complexity of today's armed conflicts creates severe difficulties for effective implementation of International Humanitarian Law.

Millions of people all over the world experience daily situations in which their rights to life and security are threatened. It is in this context that the international community needs to think of new ways to strengthen effective mechanisms to ensure respect for the Geneva Conventions. In this regard it is crucially important to develop ways to promote respect and improve compliance with these laws that continue to be an essential instrument in assuring the protection of human rights and the security of all people.

As the world faces an unprecedented situation of increasing violence, proliferation of non-state armed groups, and non-international armed conflicts, let us hope that effective compliance with the Geneva Conventions will remain an urgent priority for all those concerned with the plight of men and women who are striving for their existence in the midst of war and conflict.

Rev. Dr Samuel Kobia
General secretary

- **Minute on the right of conscientious objection to military service adopted by WCC central committee, Geneva, Switzerland, 26 August–2 September 2009**

1. The World Council of Churches (WCC) and other civil society organizations urged the United Nations in 1973 to recognize conscientious objection to military service as “a valid expression of the right of freedom of conscience” and make alternative means of service available to conscientious objectors. The Statement on the Question of Conscientious Objection to Military Service from 1973 says that the WCC and its partner organizations “believe that the time has come for the Commission (on Human Rights) to take a decisive step towards the international recognition of the right of conscientious objection to military service”. Four considerations were cited as a basis for that belief: growing concern among religious communities, respect for the right to freedom of thought and for the integrity of the individual, the role of youth in promoting peace, and the fact that the lack of alternatives to armed service leads to a waste of human resources and prison terms of young people with deeply held convictions.
2. Succeeding years have seen recognition granted in international forums and a UN covenant on civil and political rights. The ecumenical movement, through the

Conciliar Process for Justice, Peace and the Integrity of Creation, leading up to the 1990, Seoul, Korea Convocation on JPIC, reaffirmed the right to conscientious objection. As a result, conscientious objection to military service in principle has reached new levels of protection under the freedoms of thought and religion, as well as freedom of conscience.

3. A report by the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights in 2006, however, revealed serious shortfalls in many countries in recognizing and exercising the right to conscientious objection to military service and found that conscientious objectors are often subject to penalization, discrimination and imprisonment. The WCC central committee then called for a study in the light of that report.
4. The WCC study shows that in many places churches face challenges of conscientious objection. Their responses include initiatives to support conscientious objectors in some countries. Three observations provide an overview of church positions on the issue: Historic Peace Churches strongly encourage their members to refuse participation in any military actions. Meanwhile, they respect the freedom of the individual decision. Other churches consider that both civilian service and military service may be Christian options. Finally, while many, and perhaps most churches, do not have an official position on the issue, the study found no evidence of these churches speaking *against* conscientious objection.
5. The study suggests that a consensus position among churches is to affirm the right of conscientious objection so that individuals who feel they cannot bear weapons for religious or other reasons of conscience should have the possibility to object without being submitted to discrimination or punishment.
6. It is also noted that in some countries where there is a right to conscientious objection to military service, some Christians have become sensitive to the use of their tax money for supporting war, and in some cases have faced government action against them because of their conscientious objection to paying for war. This development of conscientious objection deserves further study and consideration.
7. As the Decade to Overcome Violence affirms the biblical foundations, especially as expressed in the Sermon on the Mount: The merciful, the peacemakers and the persecuted are blessed in the Beatitudes; and Jesus teaches love even for one's enemies (Matthew 5: 6-9).

Therefore, the central committee of the WCC, meeting in Geneva, Switzerland, 26 August – 2 September 2009:

- A. **Reiterates** existing WCC policy and reaffirms its support for the human right of conscientious objection for religious, moral or ethical reasons in accordance with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) and other international laws, as churches have an obligation to support those who refuse to take part in violence.
- B. **Calls** upon WCC member churches, wherever they are in a position to do so, to uphold the right of refusal to bear and use arms and to encourage church members to uphold that right as well.

- C. *Deplores* the situation that men, women and children in many parts of the world are forced into armed service under governments and also under non-governmental forces or paramilitary organizations.
- D. *Encourages* member churches to address their respective governments and military organizations to recognize and honour conscientious objection to military service as a human right under international law.
- E. *Calls* upon churches to encourage their members to object to military service in situations when the church considers armed action illegal or immoral.
- F. *Encourages* churches to study and address the issue of military or war taxes and of alternatives to military service.
- G. *Calls* upon all Christians to pray for peace, abandon violence and seek peace through nonviolent means.

Nuclear Weapons

- **Statement on the need for churches' vigilance against nuclear proliferation, WCC executive committee, Bossey, Switzerland, 27 February–2 March 2007**

Nuclear proliferation and the emerging context

For decades, the WCC has advocated at the international level for cooperative efforts to prohibit and eliminate nuclear weapons. Recent developments in global political and military contexts call for intensified and concerted church action to achieve those goals. The Minute on the "Elimination of Nuclear Arms" adopted by the WCC 9th Assembly at Porto Alegre underlines the need for the churches to impress upon their governments the immorality of nuclear weapons, and for all states to uphold, strengthen and implement the terms of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT).

In view of these recent developments, it is imperative that churches continue to raise awareness of the threat of nuclear weapons. The testing of a nuclear device on October 9, 2006 by North Korea prompted responses from the WCC that called for the international community to put nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation firmly back on track and encouraged member churches to follow up on the recommendations of the Minute adopted at WCC 9th Assembly. North Korea's nuclear weapon and ballistic missile tests threaten to destabilize the region and to undermine the agreed international objective of a nuclear-free Korean peninsula. In the Middle East, Iran's failure to assure the international community that its civilian nuclear programs are not camouflaging its intention to develop nuclear weapons capability, combined with Israel's refusal to subject all of its nuclear facilities to IAEA inspections, threatens a cascade of nuclear proliferation and frustrates the international community's agreed pursuit of the Middle East as a zone free of all weapons of mass destruction. In South Asia, the unilateral

initiative by the United States to accept India as a nuclear weapon state threatens an ongoing arms race with Pakistan and with China, with severe implications beyond the region and entrenches a nuclear double standard that threatens all other non-proliferation efforts.

The ongoing nuclear modernization programs of the nuclear weapon states – like the US, UK, France, Russia and China – along with stalled efforts to pursue arsenal reductions, exacerbates that double standard and generates growing global scepticism about the relevance and effectiveness of the NPT as an instrument for the pursuit of nuclear abolition. The dangers of the unintended or unauthorized use of nuclear weapons are heightened by the practices in the United States and Russia of maintaining nuclear weapons on high alert and available for firing within seconds of an alarm, as well as by the dangers that insufficiently secured weapons or weapons materials will fall into the hands of non-state groups committed to acts of terror.

These developments challenge the strength of the nuclear control regime. There are, however, signs of hope for a reaffirmation of the terms of the NPT for the state signatories as well as pressure for non-signatories to respect the norms the Treaty upholds. The September 2006 signing of a treaty by five Central Asian states establishing a Central Asian Nuclear Weapon Free Zone demonstrates a powerful commitment to nuclear disarmament, adding to the four existing nuclear-weapon-free zones in Latin America and the Caribbean, the South Pacific, Southeast Asia and Africa. The Central Asian states also set an important precedent by legally binding themselves to adhere to the enhanced IAEA safeguards, known as the Additional Protocol, regarding their civilian nuclear resources.

It is hoped that the 2007 session of the Conference on Disarmament (CD), after nine years of paralyzed negotiations, will demonstrate the political resolve of the states necessary to make progress. In particular, the United States and China are under pressure to end their disagreement on a program of work and thus end the stalemate in the CD by accepting the formula for negotiations on an Fissile Material Cut-Off Treaty along with discussions of the Prevention of an Arms Race in Outer Space (PAROS), nuclear disarmament, and negative security assurances.

Last year marked the 10th anniversary of the opening for signature of the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test Ban Treaty (CTBT). This treaty developed within the CD, draws attention to the fact that an essential tool for restricting the development of new nuclear weapons has yet to enter into force. In 1995, the WCC urged the adoption of this important treaty. However some of the signatories have still not ratified it and other key states have declined to sign. In particular, it is extremely important that the United States, India and Pakistan show global leadership by initiating the steps toward their respective ratification of the CTBT. Such a commitment would be one of the most effective means of limiting the spread of nuclear weapons capability and of curtailing the growth of arsenals in the DPRK, India, Israel, and Pakistan.

Although the effectiveness of the NPT is at risk, it is early in a new review cycle for the NPT. A 13-point action plan towards nuclear disarmament was adopted at the 2000 NPT Review Conference, the most important goal of which is “an unequivocal undertaking by the nuclear-weapon States to accomplish the total elimination of their nuclear arsenals.” The NPT is a crucial international agreement, as it contains the only binding commitment to nuclear disarmament in a multilateral treaty.

These developments, coupled with the continuing commitment of the vast majority of states – including the states of the New Agenda Coalition of Brazil, South Africa, Egypt, Ireland, Mexico, New Zealand and Sweden – to the NPT and to the ultimate abolition of nuclear weapons, indicate that the nuclear proliferation challenges now facing the world can be effectively met if there is political will and moral fortitude. The New Agenda Coalition has been instrumental in bringing the nuclear weapon states to the table in non-proliferation and disarmament discussions including the call for the “total elimination of nuclear weapons”.

Thus the challenge for the churches is to communicate an ethical and theological perspective on nuclear arms to their governments to support all non-proliferation efforts including those advocated by the New Agenda Coalition and other middle powers. The Christian tradition is clearly committed to the sanctity of human life and the protection of all forms of creation for the needs of future generations. Nuclear weapons violate those principles because they indiscriminately destroy human and natural life. Building on this principle, not only do the churches grapple with the fear of being destroyed, but many of them also have to reflect on the ethical implications of being part of a nation that can cause the destruction of another population.

The executive committee of the World Council of Churches, meeting in Geneva, 27 February to 2 March 2007:

- (a) *reaffirms* the churches’ consistent call for the abolition of nuclear weapons, a call that is more urgent than ever considering the pressure being placed upon nuclear weapons control mechanisms, and
- (b) *encourages* the churches to continue to communicate with their governments, to pursue the churches’ goals of the complete rejection of nuclear weapons and the claims of deterrence;
- (c) *urges* the churches to engage with other faith communities in exploring ways of working together toward the abolition of nuclear weapons, including cooperation among the faith communities of the Middle East in support of the international community’s agreed objective of establishing the Middle East as a nuclear-weapon-free-zone (NWFZ);
- (d) *commends* churches in the United Kingdom for their efforts to stop the replacement of the UK’s Trident nuclear weapons system and adds the voice of churches around the world in support of that goal.

(e) *urges* the UK government to set an historic example of leadership for the whole international community in the above matter by fulfilling its disarmament obligations under the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty. To do so would effectively challenge the other nuclear weapons states to abandon their own double standards regarding the legitimacy of weapons of mass destruction and would clearly remove an incentive for non-nuclear-weapons states to proliferate.

(f) *calls* on the churches to support the strengthening of the existing international mechanisms of verification and compliance, primarily the work of the IAEA, calls again for the CTBT to be brought into force, and to assert that the disarmament machinery such as the CD in particular, but also the Disarmament Commission and the Department for Disarmament Affairs (DDA), need to remain viable venues for action;

(g) *appeals* to the churches in the United States and China to persuade their governments to end their disagreement on a program of work and resolve the stalemate in the CD;

(h) *calls* on churches in South Africa, Sri Lanka, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland and Syria to encourage their presidencies at the Conference on Disarmament this year, where progress on a fissile material cut-off treaty (FMCT), negative security assurances (NSAs), nuclear disarmament and the prevention of an arms race in outer space (PAROS) is urgently needed;

(i) *recalls* the visit to the World Council of Churches by the chair of The Weapons of Mass Destruction Commission, Dr Hans Blix on June 15, 2006, and expresses its full support for the continuing work of the Commission with governments and civil society organizations to absorb its recommendations into political processes and concrete actions;

(j) *commits* itself to support such initiatives as the New Agenda Coalition of Brazil, South Africa, Egypt, Ireland, Mexico, New Zealand and Sweden and the Middle Powers Initiative of international non-governmental organizations to press for the fulfilment of the NPT disarmament obligations as these provide an opportunity to work with non-nuclear powers;

(k) *conveys* to the central committee the need to organize a major discussion session on churches advocacy role in working towards complete abolition of nuclear weapons at one of its upcoming sessions.

- **Speech given by WCC general secretary at the 100th Anniversary Conference of the Great Korean Revival, 9 August 2007**

Mr Moderator, Honourable Ministers and Ecumenical Colleagues,

I am honoured to be invited to speak at this important event – the 100th Anniversary Conference of the Great Korean Revival 2007, sponsored by the National Council of Churches in Korea and the Christian Council of Korea.

Today we recognize not only a watershed moment in the history of Korean Christianity, but an equally important crossroads for the church now and in years to come. In many books of church history, the event we commemorate this year is called “the Great Pyongyang Revival of 1907”, named for the city in which it was centred. Looking toward the future we may wonder: where will the next great Korean revival take place. Will it once again be in Pyongyang?

The worldwide ecumenical family has for the last four decades appreciated and admired the role of the Korean Churches in the promotion of peace and unification of the peninsula. The WCC’s fellowship, through its accompaniment of the process, has learned much from your initiatives and efforts. Despite many difficulties and obstacles, you have been consistent and persevering in your struggle for peace and justice in the service of our Lord Jesus Christ. It has been a costly witness. Members of the clergy, laymen and laywomen have made tremendous sacrifices in this endeavour.

Experience shows that the journey towards peace and justice is not easy in societies that are fractured by violence and conflicts. The WCC’s fellowship is well aware of these factors, as the Council came into being at a time the world was emerging from the horrors of the two world wars. It was against this background that the WCC’s First Assembly at Amsterdam in 1948 spoke of the importance of the churches’ contribution to peace in international relations through the Council’s life and work:

“The establishment of the WCC can be made of great moment for the life of the nations. It is a living expression of fellowship, transcending race and nation, class and culture, knit together in faith, service and understanding. Its aim will be to hasten international reconciliation through its own members and through the cooperation of all Christian churches and all [people] of goodwill. It will strive to see international difference in the light of God’s design, remembering that normally there are Christians on both sides of every frontier. It should not weary in the effort to state the Christian understanding of the will of God to promote its application to national and international policies”

Your efforts to promote peace and unification of the Korean peninsula reflect a commitment to remain faithful to the principles enunciated in this statement of the First Assembly. The World Council of Churches is privileged to have accompanied you in these efforts from Tozanso in 1984 to the present date.

About a month and a half ago I spoke in Amman, Jordan at a conference with the theme – “Churches Together for Peace with Justice in the Middle East”. The purpose of that conference was to launch the Israel-Palestine Ecumenical Forum, an instrument to catalyze and coordinate new and existing church advocacy for peace. The aim of participants is to end the occupation of Palestine in accordance with the UN resolutions and demonstrate their commitment to interreligious action for peace and justice that serves all people of the region. The Middle East, like the North-east Asia region, remains a flash point that could ignite a major conflagration in the world. The plight and sufferings of the Palestinian people are well known to the international community.

Despite efforts to bring about peace and reconciliation by multiple actors like the United Nations, the European Union and civil society groups, the region continues to suffer from the scourge of war and violence. At the launch of the ecumenical forum I reminded representatives of the churches of the Middle East and of other regions of the world present that we are co-workers with Christ in this project of hope. Our faith compels us to be artisans of peace with justice and to accompany those who are building the peace that the Lord wills for all God's peoples. This commitment is not based on any particular ideology but springs from the very nature of faith in Jesus Christ and is intrinsic to discipleship in the Church of the Prince of Peace.

Today, as individuals, communities and nations, we encounter a world that is divided and in turmoil largely because of inequitable distribution of power and resources. There is a growing trend to settle disputes and disagreements through force of arms rather than through dialogue and negotiation. The result is an increase of violence and war. The end of the cold war did not produce the much talked about peace dividend, though in some parts of the world it did bring some relief from the dangers associated with the prospects of a nuclear war, particularly where enmity between the two super powers had threatened global security. Presently, we face a variety of security concerns that have serious implications for international relations and are a constant threat to peace. Among others, these include the war in Iraq, the Israel-Palestine conflict and of course the military confrontation in the Korean peninsula. We also face an array of security problems in Africa, Europe and other continents as a result of the resurgence of religious extremism and ethnocentric nationalism. Given these situations, no single government or group of governments can be expected to contain or resolve the range of security issues that confront the international community. Addressing them requires a collective approach by multiple actors including churches and civil society.

Recent events show the enormously destructive strength and inbuilt, automatic chain reactions of violence that can result in a heavy toll in human lives as well as material and financial costs. The media images of the on-going war in Iraq, Afghanistan and last year's Israeli attack on Lebanon remain vivid in our memories.

In the circumstances, prevention of conflicts, peacemaking and peace building are moral imperatives for the churches and for civil society. This is a humanitarian and economic necessity given the exorbitant price of wars and conflicts in terms of loss of human lives and the cost of post-war re-construction. Churches and partner agencies have firsthand experience of this as they participate in humanitarian relief programmes in practically all parts of the world from Afghanistan and Lebanon to Somalia and Sudan. Churches have continually reiterated that it is not their sole prerogative to make peace, for in the end it is the responsibility of political leadership to make peace. However, it cannot be denied that in many cases churches have been instrumental in creating conditions conducive for peace; they do have a role in building a political will for peace. This they do by breaking down barriers of prejudice and distrust that give rise to conflict and violence. Jan Eliasson, a former Swedish diplomat and the first UN under-secretary-general for Humanitarian Affairs, speaking on the role of the states in conflict prevention and peacemaking, says: *"Inaction in the face of threatening conflict goes against the interests of the states to try to avoid developments that are potentially dangerous for their own*

wellbeing. This is particularly true in a period of growing interdependence and ever more complex international cooperation". The same can be said of the role of churches. They cannot afford to remain silent in situations of conflict, because any situation that impacts on the lives of the people is a matter of concern for the churches.

Like the World Council of Churches, the United Nations was born in troubled times of war and violence. This is reflected in the opening words of its charter: "*We the peoples of the United Nations determine to save the succeeding generations from the scourge of war ...*" According to Article 33 of the UN Charter, the primary responsibility of member states is to save people from the scourge of war. This Article obligates member states to seek peaceful settlement of conflicts that endanger international peace and security. Be that as it may, prevention of conflicts, peacemaking and peace building are shared responsibilities. The preamble of the charter reminds us of this by use of the words, "*We the peoples ...*" Resolution of conflict by peaceful means is a collective challenge not only for the international comity of nations but also for churches and civil society groups.

Peacemaking requires patience and perseverance, new ideas and new approaches, particularly in situations where grievances have multiplied and positions have been hardened. This calls for combined efforts both at Track I Diplomacy by sovereign states as well as Track II Diplomacy by civil society groups at national and international levels. Multi track diplomacy in recent times has emerged as an important factor in the spectrum of conflict resolution. For a lasting peace it is imperative that diplomacy have the support of the people concerned. Churches and civil society groups are in a position to mobilize people for peace. Settlement of disputes and conflicts requires the creation of a climate or ethos that is conducive to peace making between parties through confidence building measures and through de-escalation of military tensions and confrontation. In a globalized and inter-dependent world this is a shared responsibility of sovereign states and civil society groups. Civil society groups, including churches, in recent times have become important actors in peace making. The United Nations and other multilateral bodies engaged in efforts to promote peace often seek the viewpoints and concerns of these groups through formal and informal channels. Civil society has become an important partner in peace making both at the level of providing analysis as well as embarking on concrete plans of action to promote peace making and peace building programmes. The churches by the very nature of their gospel mandate have a responsibility to promote peace and work towards transformation of conflicts.

As I said earlier, the WCC's active engagement in the Korean Peace and Unification process began at Tozanso in October/November 1984. The consultation "Peace and Justice in North-east Asia" is a landmark in the history of the Korean churches' struggle for unification of the peninsula and its people. Those were difficult days of military dictatorship and rampant human rights violations. As a result of the cold war, the Korean peninsula was in the grip of an arms race. Tensions ran high. There were deliberate and conscientious efforts to promote enemy images and demonize the other. The National Security Law was used to suppress people's aspiration for justice, peace and unification on the pretext of safeguarding national security. Some participants invited to Tozanso failed to turn up because of fear of the consequences they would have to face under the dreaded National Security Law. The Tozanso consultation reaffirmed the WCC's

longstanding principle of engagement and dialogue to overcome violence and war. In the words of the consultation: *“The Churches are called to provide hope, to witness for peace, justice and unity. They must become a model of dialogue and participation for all who have been affected by the tragedy of division. Christians must surround one another in love, supporting one another in the fellowship of the Holy Spirit”*.

This historic gathering of concerned Christians identified key areas where churches needed to work. These included – among others – the struggle for peace and justice; stemming the arms race and overcoming enemy images; promoting humanitarian concerns for separated families; building awareness on the issue of unification and increasing the participation of women and youth in the movement. This remains an unfinished business.

Subsequent to the Tozanso consultation, the WCC made a pledge to continue to work in the spirit of the Tozanso process to facilitate contacts and to act as a channel of communication between the Christian communities of North and South Korea. This role of facilitation continued up to the time when the two sides were able to communicate directly with each other. The Council also called on the member churches and partner agencies to initiate and, where necessary, increase their efforts to persuade their respective governments to review their Korea policies and bring them in line with the objectives of peace, justice and reunification. It reaffirmed that the unification process should respect and recognize the reality of the two existing autonomous systems in the spirit of peaceful co-existence, with the objective of building one unified country.

It is to the credit of the WCC fellowship, particularly the member churches in Europe, North America and Japan, that they have relentlessly pursued the above goals in solidarity with their sisters and brothers in Korea.

The ecumenical journey for peace and reunification has been a long one with many ups and downs. There was a time when mere discussion of unification was considered an offence; today we witness an unprecedented increase in economic cooperation between the North and the South. Time has proved that your principled stand on the unification issue was prophetic and correct. This is evident from the positive developments that have taken place during the last few years between the two sides – cooperation on joint projects, such as reconnection of roads and railways, the Kaesung Industrial Park and tourism at Kumgang. There is also an increase of cultural contacts, joint sporting events, reunion of families and exchanges between different sectors of the Korean societies. These are positive steps that will ultimately lead to unification. The credit for these developments goes to the Korean churches for having contributed positively to the formulation of the present government policies. Progress has been good, but there is still a long way to go. The struggle for peace and unification has to continue in a geo-political climate that is more complex than it was in the 1980s.

The WCC executive committee that met in Seoul in 2004, while reaffirming the WCC central committee statement of 1989, called on member churches to mobilize support for Six Party Talks and urged the participants at these talks to give due consideration to the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea (DPRK) concern for its security. At the same time it called on the DPRK government to abandon all uranium enrichment and

plutonium extraction programmes and to move towards a verifiable return to the status reality of being a non-nuclear state party of the Nuclear Proliferation Treaty (NPT). The WCC, as you are aware, pursues a policy of nuclear disarmament. It considers production, possession and use of nuclear weapons a sin against God. The goal of the policy is total abolition of all nuclear weapons. A nuclear free world can only emerge if all states possessing or producing nuclear, biological or chemical weapons are locked into a binding schedule for the freezing, reduction and elimination of their arsenals and productive capabilities.

From both a theological and political perspective, the WCC has consistently denounced the “logic and practice of war and violence”. It has challenged churches to relinquish any theological justification for violence and work towards building a culture of peace and nonviolence. This is the basis on which the Council embarked on a Decade to Overcome Violence 2001 – 2010. Member churches, ecumenical groups, individual Christians and people of goodwill are invited to contribute to the Decade by sharing their experiences. There is much the Korean Churches can contribute to the Decade by sharing their experience regarding peace and reconciliation in the continuing commitment to overcome war and violence in the peninsula. Jesus Christ revealed his love to us on the cross and embodied the mystery of reconciliation. From the perspective of churches, reconciliation is not just harmonizing the views of parties to a conflict. True peace and reconciliation requires justice for all people. This means addressing people’s wellbeing and upholding their dignity.

The churches’ responsibility in situations of conflict is to create a favorable climate for resolution of differences by providing a platform for dialogue where both sides may freely share their perspectives and understanding of issues in order to find a common ground on which foundations for peace can be built. God’s kingdom is to be found where all people can exercise their inherent right to dignity and freedom and can live with each other in peace and harmony, where justice, compassion and love undergird the life of the community, be it on the Korean Peninsula, the Middle East or on the African continent.

As you commemorate the 100th Anniversary of the Great Korean Revival, the question before us is, how do we sustain the struggle for peace and reunification? The division between the North and the South has its roots in the cold war. It has national and international dimensions. Therefore, advocacy initiatives have to be undertaken at these two levels. We are in a new period of international relations in a globalized and interdependent world. Recent events have shown the failures of the policies of confrontation. In any case, confrontation is not the Christian way. Confrontation and violence bring only pain and suffering. Ours is the path of reconciliation. According to the teachings of the Apostle Paul: “Through Christ, God has claimed us as friends and granted us peace. God has given us the ministry of reconciliation.” (2 Cor. 5:18)

The global crisis we face has moral and spiritual dimensions that are no less profound than the crisis the world faced in the earlier stages of the ecumenical movement. Such situations can be remedied and the crisis resolved if we remain firm in our faith, knowing that peace will eventually prevail. Through your struggle in Korea you have shown us all that this is the only way forward in a divided and chaotic world.

Finally, a few words about the Six Party Talks and the way forward. The talks that began in 2003, after the initial set back and last few years of stalemate, have recently shown some signs of movement. Parties that had adopted a hard line posture have relented and now appear to be more flexible. These are positive developments.

Over the years it has been made clear that the policy of confrontation and isolation of the DPRK has not borne fruit. It has succeeded only in raising tension in the region. The only viable alternative to confrontation and isolation is engagement and dialogue. The Six Party Talks provide a platform for negotiation that can defuse tension and pave the way for a formal peace treaty. The recent shutdown by DPRK of its nuclear facilities at Yongbon is a welcome development. There is still a long way to go. The next steps in relation to the nuclear issue are going to be critical and full of potential pitfalls. These concerns vie for negotiators' attention, together with other issues: the discussion regarding the security concerns of the DPRK; provision of humanitarian aid and assistance; the tension between the DPRK and Japan over the issue of abductees; the need to ensure that the accord reached in 2006, between North and South Korea to negotiate a permanent peace regime, be closely monitored.

The ecumenical family, particularly WCC member churches in the US, China, Japan and Russia (participants of the Six Party Talks) need to persuade their respective governments to ensure the continuity of these talks to defuse tension and conflict in the peninsula so that people can live together in peace. Towards this end it may be worthwhile to explore possibilities of organizing a parallel forum of churches of countries engaged in the Six Party Talks and also the churches in Canada, Scandinavia and the European Union, at the next round of Six Party Talks. The basis for discussion at the parallel forum could be the implementation of the guidelines laid down in the "Sunshine Policy" of dialogue and engagement as proposed by the former President Kim Dae Jung, and the 15th June 2000 Joint Declaration between North and South Korea. The forum could also act as a watchdog to monitor developments at the Six Party Talks and keep the people informed of the progress.

One hundred years ago, a great spiritual revival swept this land. It is, as has been said, "a Godly heritage". But – amid all our gratitude for the blessings of the past – we must never forget that tomorrow, too, is in God's hand. We await the next great Korean revival, the next great world revival, delighting in the good news that God's kingdom has drawn near. I wish you a successful conference, and I pray that God will continue to bless the Korean churches as you work for the betterment of the people.

- **Excerpt from address by Dr Soritua Nababan on nuclear arms, speaking on behalf of WCC at the World Religious Leaders Summit for Peace on the occasion of the G8 Hokkaido Tokyo Summit, Sapporo, Japan 2-3 July 2008**

Nuclear arms deny us shared security

The last decade has seen an extraordinary deadlock emerge over the future of nuclear weapons. The risk of use of nuclear weapons is estimated to be higher today than during much of the Cold War. There are more fingers on the nuclear triggers than ever before and many ways that weapons-grade uranium could be tragically misused. Key international agreements that control nuclear arms have been blocked or greatly weakened by nuclear powers and others pursuing narrow doctrines of *national* security. For now, *shared security* is a prospect, a hope, a premise that society may support but that nuclear weapons possession simply denies.

The crisis we face is political, economic, environmental, psychological and spiritual in nature. Politically, as the past decade of failure to proceed with Non-Proliferation Treaty obligations has eroded the global bargain that is the core of this most important disarmament treaty in history. The result – in a world divided into nuclear 'haves' and 'have-nots' and often polarized along those lines – is deeply destabilizing. The economics of nuclear armaments is an untold story of financial profligacy. The historic allocation of resources to the world's deadliest weapon is unconscionable in its own time and unthinkable for our common future. In a world of endemic hunger, disease and poverty, in a world of over-consumption, pollution and climate change, the full cost of keeping nuclear weapons must be understood. In the first 50 years of the nuclear age, for example, the country with the world's largest economy devoted one-ninth of all government spending to its nuclear weapons programs. The US has spent approximately 115 billion dollars each year for 50 years from 1946-96 on nuclear armament. Vast expenses are continuing to this day. Surely, as the World Council of Churches General Assembly has said, "through the troubled years of the Cold War and into the present time...God has saved us from ourselves." Environmentally, nuclear armaments, like global warming, are manmade aberrations related to the misuse of energy. The scale of misuse is so great that both nuclear arms and climate change threaten life on a planetary scale. Both require a global response in the fullest sense of the term. It is the spiritual and psychological costs of having nuclear weapons, however, that we must reckon most directly as religious leaders. Nuclear weapons demand of us the opposite of what God intended for the human community. Nuclear weapons owners control others with fear, hate, resentment and grudging acquiescence. And the owners of nuclear weapons reap what they sow. They are consigned to the same prison of fear and intimidation they impose on others.

Nuclear strategy during the Cold War relied on a 'balance of terror'. The concept still lives, unfortunately, in the posture and behaviour of nuclear powers today, all eight of them. And now there is a so-called 'war on terror' as well. Under its logic nuclear doctrines have been rewritten in the attempt to justify new uses for an unusable weapon. International responsibilities and obligations that are the building blocks of shared security are ignored, once again, for the inherently destabilizing goals of national security. Let us be clear: Shared security cannot coexist with nuclear-armed nationhood.

In a multi-religious world, what are the particular approaches that need to be identified and analyzed in order to remove this fundamental block against shared security and shared sanity?

When it comes to nuclear weapons, advancing our shared security can only mean one thing – the complete and enduring elimination of those weapons. There is no other position we can take if we are to keep faith with our neighbours and keep faith with God.

A nuclear free world? Let us not be silent. Getting there will be difficult. Yet there are many steps that lead toward the goal: Most of you are from states that have decided to abstain from developing nuclear weapons. Some of you are from states that had nuclear weapons but gave them up. Some of you are from states that are working hard to break the current impasse that pits nuclear powers against non-nuclear powers. Most of your governments promote the same long-awaited steps: ratifying the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty, strengthening nuclear inspections and safeguards under the IAEA, negotiating treaties to control fissile material. These are but three of the 13 steps agreed eight years ago, in 2000, during a period of shared security thinking. But since then the actions of a few states have frustrated the hopes of the many. The many states have not come together for the common good.

One of those 13 steps, the most ambitious, says the abolition of nuclear arms is an "unequivocal undertaking" for nuclear weapon states. I would add that my own country, Indonesia, is the chief sponsor of an important step to take us forward in that direction: the Model Nuclear Weapons Convention, a binding global agreement to bring nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation firmly under the rule of law.

Let us have courage in overcoming delays and achieving the goal. Non-nuclear states, international civil society organizations and world religions together have much strength. In many countries and in this one, nearly 3000 cities are joining forces to help end the nuclear danger through an association called Mayors for Peace. The dynamic mayor of Hiroshima leads these Mayors for Peace. They bring nuclear advocacy to the local level, where it is most accessible to religious communities. To join them is to make a local-global witness with your own community. I commend the idea to us all.

Let us pass the test of discernment. A nuclear bomb is a thing that should never have been made. We must unite to unmake it. Turning the inner workings of the cosmos into a weapon of mass destruction, as a nuclear bomb does, is a peculiarly grievous sin. Let us recognize the fact. Can religions work together to free the human household from this weapons? Can we join forces to release humanity from a doomsday fate we have inflicted on ourselves?

The commitment of world religions to advancing shared security means bringing governments to make good on their promise to free the world of nuclear weapons. That is the pact signed by 189 states. That is the reality favoured by solid majorities in international opinion polls. And that is the hope written into the human heart.

In its statement "On the Elimination of Nuclear Weapons," the last Assembly of the World Council of Churches affirmed that "all people of faith are needed in our day to expose the fallacies of nuclear doctrine." The Assembly called on member churches and parishes to overcome complacency in society concerning the nuclear threat and to raise awareness among younger generations of what these weapons actually do. WCC governing bodies are urging churches to "engage with other faith communities" in work for the abolition of nuclear weapons, including supporting Nuclear Weapon Free Zones and "cooperation among the faith communities of the Middle East in support of the international community's agreed objective of establishing the Middle East as a nuclear-weapon-free-zone."

These ecumenical positions bear considerable promise. Working with them 'locates' a faith-based response to nuclear arms geopolitically. Africa will become a nuclear-weapon-free zone, for example, when just three more states ratify the Treaty of Pelindaba. Church leaders are promoting the goal. The whole Southern Hemisphere will then be covered by nuclear weapon free zones. In a world of shared nuclear insecurity, what a message for the Global South to send to the nuclear powers who are all in the Northern Hemisphere.

Those who seek the end of nuclear weapons are obligated to take an inter-disciplinary approach. The nature of the nuclear challenge invites alliances of minds and hearts, linking theologians and clerics with scientists, doctors, lawyers, sociologists and diplomats, to name but a few. Different disciplines are needed to untie the knot of fear used to justify such weapons of mass destruction...and to help build structures of shared security in their place.

Renewed progress against the nuclear threat requires the *practical application and cooperation* based on understandings already reached in interreligious dialogues. We understand each other well enough to tackle this elemental danger. It is an exercise of faith to meet the common threat that nuclear arms pose to human life, to all forms of life and to the stewardship of God's creation. May it not remain so indefinitely. May we be conscious of the need for a new global ethos to inform international public policies. May we find ways to create it. Progress toward a nuclear free world requires multi-religious cooperation in the service of shared security.

We, religious leaders from all over the world, have the responsibility to speak out to the G8 to effectively respond to these challenges. Major changes are needed at the international political sphere if we care for humanity and our planet earth. G8 has an immense responsibility and we should not be shy in raising the concerns of the majority of the world population. As religious leaders we need to accompany our message with our own witness, prayer and commitment. May God bless us in this task.

Thank you for your attention.

- **Letter to the Council of Churches in Namibia thanking them for their help in having arranged meetings with government officials to discuss the churches' position on the Treaty of Pelindaba and a NWFZ, 13 October 2008**

Dear Rev. Strydom and Rev. Kapolo,

This letter comes with greetings and best wishes for you in follow-up to the recent WCC visit. It was a peace issue that brought us and we ask for the blessings of the Prince of Peace on the Council of Churches and God's guidance in your service.

Together with Ambassador Bethuel Kiplagat and your brother ambassador, Mr Andre September, it was certainly a privilege to meet in Windhoek. Despite the many pressing issues on the agendas of the CCN, we are grateful for your sensitivity toward the nuclear concern and for the input you added from related areas of work and experience. Mr September's good offices were exemplary in arranging key meetings that began with you.

We came with a matter of concern to churches at the global level—the new nuclear danger. The concern becomes concrete when it is located in a national and regional context.

Having the CCN represented in the meetings with the government was important and much appreciated, Rev Strydom.

Given the rather positive response from government there is reason to believe that ratification of the Treaty of Pelindaba will follow. As that happens, Namibia will be taking a step to help Africa protect itself from nuclear weapons and to create a framework where uranium is more likely to be mined responsibly and traded with the necessary safeguards.

We took special note that you placed the issue in the framework of good governance – both in terms of the international obligations that Namibia has assumed and in fulfilling certain universal responsibilities locally.

I would like to add that I was able to meet with Bishop Zephaniah Kameeta to inform him about the visit.

We look forward to being in further contact over the matter. If we can be of help on some aspect of it from Geneva, please let us know. There is reason to hope for success on this national issue.

Yours in Christ,

Jonathan Frerichs
Programme executive, CCIA

cc: Amb. Bethuel Kiplagat, Africa Peace Forum
Mr Andre September, UCCSA and CCIA-WCC
Rev. Dr Samuel Kobia, WCC
Rev. Elenora Giddings-Ivory, WCC

- **Letter from WCC general secretary to Ambassador Bethuel Kiplagat of the Africa Peace Forum and Mr André September, president of the UCCSA and CCIA commissioner, thanking them for their leadership and collaboration in the visits to the government of Namibia regarding the ratification of the Treaty of Pelindaba, 17 November 2008**

Dear Kip, dear André,

Grace to you and peace in the name of the Lord who is called the Prince of Peace.

This letter is a word of appreciation and thanks to both of you for your recent service to the international ecumenical community on a matter related to the peace and security of Africa.

Please receive our gratitude for your leadership and collaboration in the visits to the Government of Namibia concerning the ratification of the Treaty of Pelindaba. You have enabled the World Council of Churches to make an important representation in a carefully chosen place. By working to see this long-awaited treaty become law, churches bring forward a timely concern. It is also good that a channel is open to the Council of Churches in Namibia by the delegation and through your church office, Mr September.

Addressing a systemic threat in its global-national dimensions is a fitting task for the WCC and a long tradition of the Commission of the Churches on International Affairs. Your willingness to lend your rich expertise and understanding to this on-going endeavour is greatly appreciated.

Judging from the schedule of appointments – foreign affairs, the parliament, and justice – the visits in Windhoek followed the path that the Treaty ratification must take. In addition, you paid a visit to our former colleague, Dr Nora Schimming-Chase, who is now a member of the opposition. The challenges of nuclear arms control and energy safeguards call for common action across party lines in every country.

May the required ratifications of the treaty come soon. The goal appears to be near. We will all celebrate the day when the African continent comes under the legal, political and moral protections that a Nuclear Weapon Free Zone affords. By demonstrating its concern for collective security on an issue involving both weapons and resources, Africa will be sending the Nuclear Weapons States (and others) a much-needed signal about global priorities from the global South.

I look forward to following developments in this area with my colleagues Elenora Giddings-Ivory and Jonathan Frerichs.

You have my thanks and prayers for your work and for your partnership in the public ministries of the churches.

Yours in Christ,
Rev. Dr Samuel Kobia
General secretary

- **Letter from WCC general secretary to government officials thanking them for meeting with the WCC to discuss the ratification of the Treaty of Pelindaba, 25 March 2009**

Letters were sent to: The Honourable Marco Hausika MP, minister of Foreign Affairs; Mr Steve Katjiuanjo, permanent secretary of the Ministry of Justice; and the Honourable Theo-Ben Gurirab MP, speaker of the National Assembly of the government of Namibia.

This letter comes to you with the greetings and good wishes of the World Council of Churches in Geneva. We are writing to enquire about a matter which brought an ecumenical delegation to Windhoek late last year, namely, ratification of the Treaty of Pelindaba.

It was our privilege along with the Council of Churches in Namibia to meet with you at that time and to discuss the importance of the treaty and the Africa Nuclear Weapon Free Zone. Those discussions included the welcome prospect that ratification in the near term by your government would place Namibia among the first 28 ratifying states – the group which will bring the Pelindaba treaty into force.

As you may recall, nuclear issues are a matter of concern to churches around the world and have been for many years. Our delegation was in Namibia pursuant to a WCC policy of promoting nuclear-weapon-free zones as important and timely regional security measures, nowhere more so than Africa. Members were pleased to visit the country where the first complete draft of the Pelindaba treaty was negotiated in 1994 and to see the importance of the commercial, environmental and security benefits it affords to Namibia.

Our delegation was also encouraged to learn during our visits with you and Ambassador Martin Andjaba, with the Speaker of Parliament, the Honorable Theo Ben Gurirab, and at the Ministry of Justice, that Namibia is in a good position to ratify its signature of the treaty.

With members of the delegation we would look forward to hearing how the matter stands at this time. Thank you for your attention to this sign of international interest.

Sincerely yours,
Rev. Dr Samuel Kobia
General secretary

cc: Amb. Bethuel Kiplagat, Africa Peace Forum
Mr Andre September, United Congregational Church in Southern Africa &
CCIA/WCC
Rev. Philip Strydom, Council of Churches in Namibia
M. Jonathan Frerichs, WCC

- **Letter from WCC general secretary to The Most Rev. Bernard Ntahoturi, Archbishop of the Anglican Church of Burundi and Ambassador Bethuel Kiplagat of the Africa Peace Forum, thanking them for their service and leadership of the WCC delegation to Burundi in support of the African NWFZ, 25 March 2009**

Dear Archbishop, dear Ambassador Kiplagat,

I would like to extend my gratitude to both of you for your service and leadership of the WCC delegation to Burundi in support of the African Nuclear-Weapon-Free Zone.

The WCC Assembly in Porto Alegre called member churches to “support and strengthen Nuclear-Weapon-Free Zones” as part of the Decade to Overcome Violence and mentioned the case of Africa. In a similar vein shortly thereafter the African Union declared the Pelindaba Treaty “an important part of the overall peace and security architecture of the African Union.” The AU also noted that Pelindaba has “added global resonance” because of current threats from weapons of mass destruction.

WCC work in this field has been gathering momentum on various fronts just as there increasing signs of movement in controlling arms. With your help the ecumenical community has now been able to make the case for African security in a country that has only recently emerged from mass violence of a different sort.

I am encouraged to learn that you received positive indications from the government of Burundi concerning Pelindaba ratification and there was visible progress during the period of your stay. Burundi has shown itself willing to make the connection between peace in one country and peace in Africa, and is also assisting with peace-keeping duties in the sub-region.

That high officials recognized the role of Burundi's churches in securing peace including the Anglican Church of Burundi, is well-deserved. It is also noteworthy that they linked the commitment of churches to peace nationally and internationally.

A constructive ecumenical intervention on an international issue requires cooperation across various borders. We were blessed with that combination in this case, thanks to your various contributions.

We will continue to pursue this matter with you and, when the 28-state ratification requirement is met, we look forward to an appropriate recognition of the fact with the AU.

Yours sincerely,
Rev. Dr Samuel Kobia
General secretary

- **Letter to NATO secretary general with copies to heads of government of the NATO member states regarding NATO's reliance on nuclear weapons, 30 March 2009**

Your Excellency,

This letter comes to you, to the leaders of other NATO members and to the NATO Secretary General from the councils that represent churches across the member states of NATO, namely, the Conference of European Churches, the National Council of Churches of Christ USA, the Canadian Council of Churches and the World Council of Churches.

Our letter is a joint initiative to encourage joint action. We ask your Government to ensure that the forthcoming NATO summit commits the Alliance to a thorough reform of NATO's Strategic Concept. The 60th anniversary meeting is a welcome opportunity to begin the process of up-dating the Alliance's security doctrine. In particular, we encourage new initiatives that will end NATO's reliance on nuclear weapons and will engage with nuclear weapon states and other states outside of NATO in the serious pursuit of reciprocal disarmament.

Such collective action by NATO can be a major factor in revitalizing the nuclear non-proliferation regime at this critical time. It is also an important opportunity for the alliance to reinforce the vision of a world without nuclear weapons so compellingly put forward in recent months by eminent figures on the global security stage. UN secretary-general Ban Ki-moon, former US secretary of state Henry Kissinger, former Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev, four elder statesmen of Germany and former foreign secretaries of the United Kingdom are among those urging both a recovery of that vision and concrete steps to realize it.

NATO has the opportunity to fashion a new strategic doctrine that, on the one hand, takes full account of the threats posed by nuclear weapons, and, on the other hand, takes full advantage of the political momentum that is now finally available to support decisive inter-governmental action against the nuclear threat.

We encourage NATO to consign to history the notion that nuclear weapons “preserve peace” (as claimed in paragraph 46 of the current Strategic Concept), and instead to recognize the reality that “with every passing year [nuclear weapons] make our security more precarious” (President Gorbachev’s assessment; echoed by other leaders).

We are convinced that NATO security in the years ahead will require not only long-delayed action on reciprocal disarmament but also concerted new action to resolve injustices, divisions and conflicts that affect both the Alliance and its neighbours. We believe security must be sought through constructive engagement with neighbours and that authentic security is found in affirming and enhancing human interdependence within God’s one creation.

Inasmuch as all NATO members are signatories to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), we urge the Alliance to promote the actual implementation of the backlog of disarmament and non-proliferation measures already elaborated through the NPT review process or awaiting negotiation as the current cycle culminates.

One very important measure of NATO’s good faith in terms of NPT and the pursuit of nuclear disarmament will be its willingness to remove the 150-250 US tactical nuclear weapons still based in five member countries – Germany, Belgium, Netherlands, Italy and Turkey. In so doing NATO would boost international confidence in an NPT regime that has been seriously eroded since 2000. NATO would also honour the longstanding international call that all nuclear weapons be returned to the territories of the states that own them. Removal of these weapons would be a timely signal that NATO’s old nuclear umbrella will not be extended and that there are real prospects for progress on collective security agreements in greater Europe.

The emerging vision of a world without nuclear weapons is giving citizens and churches in every NATO country cause for hope. We are requesting that NATO’s security doctrine be realigned in a direction which establishes such hopes.

Sincerely,

Rev. Dr Samuel Kobia, general secretary, World Council of Churches
The Venerable Colin Williams, general secretary, Conference of European Churches
Rev. Michael Kinnamon, Ph.D., general secretary, National Council of the Churches of Christ in the USA
The Rev. Dr Karen Hamilton, general secretary, The Canadian Council of Churches

- **Letters from WCC general secretary to Burundi government officials thanking them for their recent meeting with a WCC delegation to discuss the ratification of the Treaty of Pelindaba, 7 April 2009**

The letters were sent to the Honourable Dr Yves Sahinguvu, first vice president; the Honourable Pie Ntavyohanyuma, president of the National Assembly; and the Honourable Gervais Rufykiri, president of the Senate of the government of Burundi.

Votre Excellence,

J'ai le très grand plaisir de vous adresser ici l'expression de ma reconnaissance. Je tiens à vous remercier pour la rencontre que vous avez eue récemment, au sujet de la ratification du Traité de Pelindaba, avec la délégation du Conseil œcuménique des Eglises, composée de l'Ambassadeur Bethuel Kiplagat, de l'archevêque Bernard Ntahoturi et de M. Jonathan Frerichs, membre de notre secrétariat.

Nous avons entrepris cette démarche en sachant que d'importantes questions figuraient à l'ordre du jour du peuple et du gouvernement du Burundi. Nos délégués se sont rendus à Bujumbura en étant parfaitement conscients des résultats obtenus par votre pays dans le but de renforcer la paix. Nous savions également que le Burundi est disposé à apporter son aide à d'autres pour garantir la paix et que cet engagement lui a dernièrement beaucoup coûté.

Au cours du dialogue qu'ils ont eu avec vous, nos délégués ont clairement perçu cette détermination. Vous nous avez reçus en tant que délégation d'Eglise venue parler de paix et vous avez souligné le souci qui est depuis longtemps celui de l'Eglise en ce qui concerne le désarmement dans tous les domaines, y compris pour ce qui est de la guerre nucléaire. Vous avez également rendu hommage au rôle joué par les Eglises du Burundi au cours de la longue recherche de la paix de cette nation.

Le Conseil œcuménique des Eglises partage le large consensus selon lequel la sécurité et le développement panafricains bénéficieront de la mise en application du Traité de Pelindaba. Nous avons été heureux d'apprendre que le dossier de ratification vous avait déjà été transmis au moment de notre visite.

Nous nous réjouissons à l'avance d'apprendre l'aboutissement du processus de ratification du Traité de Pelindaba par le Burundi. Si cette décision intervenait dans des délais appropriés, le Burundi pourrait bien figurer parmi les 28 premiers pays ayant ratifié, qui auront alors la mission de mettre en œuvre le traité, sous les auspices de l'Union africaine. Dans cette perspective, il serait bon que la décision puisse être prise au cours de l'actuelle session parlementaire.

N'hésitez pas à reprendre contact avec nous pour le cas où nous pourrions vous être utiles en cette affaire. Le Burundi et le travail en faveur de la paix resteront présents dans nos prières.

Je vous prie de bien vouloir agréer, Excellence, l'expression de ma très haute considération,

Pasteur Samuel Kobia
Secrétaire général

- **Letter from WCC general secretary to Rev. Pastor Isaac Bimpenda, president of the National Council of Churches in Burundi, thanking him for meeting with a WCC delegation to discuss the ratification of the Treaty of Pelindaba, 7 April 2009**

Cher Pasteur Bimpenda,

Je tiens à vous remercier, au nom du Conseil œcuménique des Eglises, pour la rencontre que vous avez eue dernièrement avec la délégation œcuménique composée de l'Ambassadeur Bethuel Kiplagat, de M. Jonathan Frerichs, et du secrétaire provincial de l'Eglise anglicane, le pasteur Pédaçuli Birakengana.

Nous avons entrepris cette démarche en sachant que d'importantes questions figuraient à l'ordre du jour des Eglises du Burundi. Nos délégués se sont rendus à Bujumbura en étant parfaitement conscients des efforts entrepris par l'Eglise, la société civile et le gouvernement dans le but de renforcer la paix. Notre visite a été possible grâce à l'aide apportée par l'archevêque Bernard Ntahoturi.

Vous avez reçu les membres de notre délégation comme des frères en Christ venus parler de paix. Pour toute la communauté de l'Eglise, c'est une bénédiction que d'avoir pu partager avec vous cette préoccupation internationale. Plus encore, vous avez manifesté votre volonté que les Eglises du Burundi fassent part au gouvernement de leur soutien à une décision nationale en faveur du Traité de Pelindaba.

Le Conseil œcuménique des Eglises a la conviction que la sécurité et le développement panafricains bénéficieront de la mise en application du Traité de Pelindaba. À la suite des rencontres que nous avons eues avec des représentants du gouvernement, il semble que la ratification de la signature du Burundi soit en bonne voie. Voici les personnes que nous avons rencontrées :

L'honorable Dr Yves Sahinguvu, premier vice-président de la République
L'honorable Pie Ntavyohanyhuma, président de l'Assemblée nationale
L'honorable Gervais Rufyikiri, président du Sénat
M. Benjamin Manirakiza, directeur, Département des affaires juridiques,
Ministère des Relations extérieures

Nous nous réjouissons à l'avance d'apprendre l'aboutissement du processus de ratification du Traité de Pelindaba. Si cette décision intervenait dans des délais

appropriés, le Burundi pourrait bien figurer parmi les 28 premiers pays ayant ratifié, qui auront alors la mission de mettre en œuvre le traité, sous les auspices de l'Union africaine.

Il nous semble possible que les Eglises du Burundi fassent connaître au gouvernement leur soutien à cette décision et manifestent leur approbation une fois la ratification intervenue. N'hésitez pas à reprendre contact avec nous pour le cas où nous pourrions vous être utiles en cette affaire. Le Burundi et le travail en faveur de la paix resteront présents dans nos prières.

Je vous prie de recevoir l'assurance de mes fraternelles salutations,

Pasteur Samuel Kobia
Secrétaire général

cc : Archevêque Bernard Ntahoturi, Eglise anglicane du Burundi
Ambassadeur Bethuel Kiplagat, Africa Peace Forum
M. Jonathan Frerichs, COE

- **Public comment by WCC general secretary on the North Korea nuclear test, 25 May 2009**

The World Council of Churches is deeply troubled by North Korea's nuclear test and profoundly concerned for the people of North Korea and surrounding countries, none of whose interests are served by this tragic failure of international relations.

The WCC is concerned that the North Korean government and the leaders of the international community not only solve this crisis peacefully now but also urgently resolve the far-reaching problems such a test reveals. In this context we express our concern for the future of the Six-Party Talks.

Member churches of the World Council of Churches in every region of the world have consistently condemned nuclear weapons as a sin against God and humankind. Creating nuclear armaments is deadly abuse of human potential and a lethal misuse of God-given resources.

Ten days ago at the United Nations, five nuclear powers and nearly 200 non-nuclear states concluded a remarkably positive meeting on the world's most important arms control treaty, the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty. Many of the governments present are now speaking of cooperation to move the world beyond the nuclear threats and instabilities that developed during and since the Cold War. It is unfortunate that North Korea was not there; neither were Pakistan, India or Israel. As the governing bodies of the WCC and many other international bodies have repeatedly stressed, all states need to join in negotiating and achieving the elimination of nuclear weapons.

There is no place for nuclear arsenals in international affairs – whether by a country like North Korea or by the eight other self-appointed nuclear powers that would have others believe their security requires weapons of mass destruction.

The international community has just begun to re-ignite the vision of a world free of nuclear weapons. We especially appreciate the leadership on this question by the United Nations Secretary General Ban Ki-moon, who calls nuclear weapons a "global public good of the highest order". It is our hope and prayer that – in the Korean peninsula and globally – governments and civil society including faith-based groups will work resolutely to make this widely welcomed vision a reality.

- **Public statement by WCC general secretary on the Russia-US nuclear agreement, 7 July 2009**

It is heartening that the leaders of the United States and Russia have now made a preliminary agreement and public commitment to achieve specific cuts in each country's stockpiles of strategic nuclear weapons. Their proposed cut is an encouraging initiative and a step forward on the difficult but essential journey that the world must take to free itself from the spectre of self-destruction. The World Council of Churches has called for the abolition of nuclear arms since shortly after their inception. As possessors of most of the world's nuclear weapons, it is necessary that these two powers lead nuclear disarmament by concrete example. In accepting the principle for a framework agreement which is aimed to replace the 1991 Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (START), the leaders of the US and Russia are preparing to reduce their nuclear weapons.

We recognize the commitment of both the US and Russian leaders' joint responsibility for nuclear arms control. We urge them to stand side by side in that shared responsibility and make urgent and unambiguous progress together. In fact, we believe that by doing so they will gradually gain the moral authority needed to encourage other states in eliminating these weapons of mass destruction. Making the world safe from nuclear weapons will require levels of cooperation and trust that are also indispensable in tackling the most global problems of our day.

Agreement by the two major powers to cooperate in limiting nuclear arms, which will enhance and improve international relations in the 21st Century, would be widely welcomed among member churches of the World Council of Churches. Most live in countries that have long-since committed themselves to a world free of nuclear weapons and have already waited decades for nuclear-weapon states to do the same. Our common prayer is for security that is shared by all.

- **Letter of thanks from WCC general secretary to officials in Burundi for having deposited the 28th ratification of the African NWFZ Treaty, with which the Treaty of Pelindaba entered into force, 24 August 2009**

The letter was sent to the Honourable Pie Ntavyohanyuma, President of the National Assembly, and the Honourable Dr Yves Sahinguvu, First Vice-President of Burundi.

Vos Excellences,

Nous avons le très grand plaisir de vous adresser ici l'expression de la reconnaissance du Conseil œcuménique des Eglises. Nous tenons à vous remercier pour une action récente du gouvernement burundais.

Nous nous réjouissons d'apprendre l'aboutissement du processus de ratification du Traité de Pelindaba par le Burundi.

Votre pays a fait progresser un travail collectif impliquant tout le continent africain. Cette ratification étant la 28^{ème} ratification depuis la création du traité, le Burundi figure parmi les 28 premiers pays ayant ratifié et qui ont maintenant la mission de mettre en œuvre le traité sous les auspices de l'Union africaine.

Nous vous félicitons pour cette démarche nationale qui a des conséquences importantes pour l'Afrique et la communauté internationale.

La création de zones exemptes d'armes nucléaires rend les autres mesures de contrôle d'armes nucléaires encore plus urgentes. Cette décision africaine intervient dans une période où nous plaçons de grands espoirs dans les mesures que prendront les grandes puissances nucléaires pour augmenter la sécurité internationale. Ici à Genève, au sein des Nations Unies, l'entrée en vigueur du Traité de Pelindaba a été remarquée aux plus hauts niveaux diplomatiques.

Bien sur d'autres questions importantes figurent à l'ordre du jour du peuple et du gouvernement du Burundi. Cependant, nos délégués à Bujumbura étaient impressionnés par l'engagement de votre pays pour le renforcement de la paix et par la volonté de bien préparer les élections nationales. Le Burundi apporte aussi son aide à la Somalie pour protéger un pays fragile et un peuple vivant dans l'incertitude.

Avec l'entrée en vigueur du Traité de Pelindaba, l'Afrique n'est plus la seule zone exempte d'armes nucléaires: tout l'hémisphère sud de notre planète est maintenant couvert de zones semblables. Au total, 118 pays sont protégés. Tout comme l'Afrique, ces derniers ont tous voté pour la sécurité, le désarmement, la protection collective contre les puissances nucléaires, et aussi pour le développement des activités nucléaires pacifiques.

Nous sommes convaincus que le rôle des Eglises est depuis toujours la recherche de la paix. Le travail en faveur de la paix au Burundi et en Afrique reste présent dans nos prières.

Je vous prie de bien vouloir agréer, Vos Excellences, l'expression de ma très haute considération,

Pasteur Samuel Kobia
Secrétaire général

cc : Ambassadeur Zacharie Gahutu, chef de cabinet
Archevêque Bernard Ntahoturi, Eglise anglicane du Burundi
Ambassadeur Bethuel Kiplagat, Africa Peace Forum
Pasteur Isaac Bimpenda, président du Conseil national des Eglises du Burundi,
Union des Eglises baptistes du Burundi
M. Jonathan Frerichs, COE

- **Statement of hope in a year of opportunity: seeking a nuclear-weapon-free world, WCC central committee, Geneva, Switzerland, 26 August–2 September 2009**

“The production and deployment as well as the use of nuclear weapons are a crime against humanity and must be condemned on ethical and theological grounds.” William Thompson, Presbyterian Church USA, Vancouver Assembly, 1983

The international community is in a season of hope. Eminent world and national figures now advocate for a world without nuclear weapons, reversing longstanding policies. Global majorities for nuclear disarmament are astir in cities, parliaments, the sciences and religions. President Barack Obama has acknowledged that, as the only nation ever to use nuclear weapons in war, the United States must lead in their elimination. The 65-nation United Nations (UN) Conference on Disarmament has adopted a program of work after a dozen years of political and procedural stalemate. Africa has brought its 1996 nuclear-weapon-free zone (NWFZ) treaty into force and, with it, nuclear weapons are banned from a majority of the world's countries for the first time. These positive developments must be encouraged and deepened.

Seven decades into the nuclear age, the onus for international peace bears down ever harder on the five permanent members of the UN Security Council. Their possession of nuclear weapons is fundamentally incompatible with their privileged responsibility for international peace and security. The 183 non-nuclear-weapon states still await the five nuclear states to fulfil the pledge to eliminate their nuclear weapons.

Meanwhile, nuclear forces remain on high alert, nuclear know-how, technology and materials are accessible to diverse groups, more nuclear power plants cause increased security and pollution problems, militaries routinely break norms on the use of force and

the protection of civilians, and progress toward global public goods is pre-empted by national sovereignty. India, Pakistan, Israel, and, in all likelihood, North Korea possess nuclear weapons outside the treaty. The time to act is now.

It is essential for the international community to face up to this great challenge together and to take advantage of a number of promising opportunities that the coming year presents. Churches, international civil society groups, and a world public will be watching governments for convincing evidence of progress, while taking responsibility for action and advocacy themselves. The focus for participation and concern includes:

- International Day of Peace, 21 September 2009 – The UN-sponsored day merits wide observance. This year it comes with 100 reasons to disarm and builds on the UN secretary general's Five Point Proposal for nuclear disarmament.
- International Day of Prayer for Peace, 21 September 2009 – In an agreement with the UN, and as part of the Decade to Overcome Violence, the World Council of Churches (WCC) invites member churches worldwide to make this an annual day of prayer for peace.
- US president chairs UN Security Council, 24 September 2009 – A special disarmament session for heads of state chaired by President Obama presents a unique opportunity for the Council's permanent members to acknowledge the essential link between nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation. A collective commitment to far greater transparency in reporting on their nuclear arsenals would be a welcome first step in turning today's inspiring disarmament rhetoric into action. Transparency is feasible, indispensable and long overdue.
- UN General Assembly and its First Committee, September-October 2009 – With the spectre of renewed stalemate arising again at the Conference on Disarmament (CD) in Geneva, remedial action at the General Assembly in New York may be needed. If the CD cannot negotiate a Fissile Materials Cut-off Treaty now, as it has agreed, it may be necessary for the UN General Assembly and First Committee to charge another appropriate body with the task.
- Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (START) renewal, 5 December 2009 – The US and Russia have added hope to this year of opportunity by commencing negotiations. It is urgent that START II sets the target for weapons reductions at the lowest stated level, namely 1,500 nuclear warheads each.
- African Nuclear-Weapon-Free Zone – We salute the African states that have ratified the Treaty of Pelindaba and brought it into force, most recently Burundi, Malawi, Mozambique and Ethiopia. We welcome Namibia's progress in this regard and urge completion of all remaining ratifications. We ask that Russia and the US join China, Britain and France in ratifying the treaty protocols that give Africa added protections. Africa's success demonstrates the new leadership of a 116-country world majority in protecting national territory from nuclear dangers. The Southern Hemisphere and much of the global South thus send an urgent signal to the nuclear-dominated north.
- Meeting of nuclear-weapon-free zones, April 2010 – An important political and geographic majority will gather prior to the 2010 Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty

(NPT) Review Conference. Its agenda is likely to include confidence-building measures these zones can undertake, particularly in areas of tension including the Middle East and northeast Asia. Representatives from civil societies, including churches, will be present. States that have established NWFZs will seek to consolidate their strength around practical measures. These include accessions to existing treaties, security protocols with nuclear weapon states, and expert groups to address key issues for future NWFZs.

- Conclusion of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) security policy review, 2010 – The WCC, the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the US, the Canadian Council of Churches and the Conference of European Churches have called upon NATO to abandon the notion that nuclear weapons preserve peace, and to take full advantage of the current political momentum to eliminate its reliance on nuclear arms, including the removal of foreign nuclear weapons based in five NATO member countries. The recent joint letter to NATO leaders stated that “security must be sought through constructive engagement with neighbours and that authentic security is found in affirming and enhancing human interdependence in God’s one creation”.
- NPT Review Conference, 2010 – By this much-anticipated mid-year meeting, the nuclear-weapon states must have made agreements that confirm their good faith commitment to fulfil more of their disarmament obligations. At minimum, this will include entry into force of the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty, consensus on an advanced draft of the Fissile Materials Cut-off Treaty, and agreement on the transparency measures mentioned above. It will also require clear commitment to progress in the next cycle of the NPT including a plan to begin intensive work on a Nuclear Weapons Convention.

The international community stands before a year of opportunity. The central committee of the WCC, meeting in Geneva, Switzerland, 26 August – 2 September 2009:

- A. **Encourages** governments and other parties involved to look to this year of disarmament opportunities with urgency and hope.
- B. **Challenges** the nuclear-weapon states to fulfil their “unequivocal undertaking to accomplish the total elimination of their nuclear arsenals leading to nuclear disarmament” (2000 Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty Review Conference).
- C. **Invites** churches to support their governments in making whole regions of the world safer from nuclear weapons through the establishment and strengthening of nuclear weapon free zones.
- D. **Calls upon** member churches to declare to their national leaders, “Transform opportunity into action. Signal your intentions to the global majority who want the elimination of nuclear weapons, and supply the proof of progress. Let a year of cooperation reverse a decade of nuclear deadlock. Reject weapons that should never have been made and that must never be used. Begin now to fulfil the international treaty promise to free the world from nuclear weapons. Put a deadline on this obligation to us all.”

- **Letter from WCC general secretary to members of the UN Security Council prior to a special heads-of-state session of the Security Council asking for a clear commitment to joint action, 18 September 2009**

Your Excellency,

With an eye to the United Nations Security Council session on 24 September 2009 and to the months ahead, the World Council of Churches recently adopted a policy paper titled *Statement of hope in a year of opportunity: Seeking a nuclear-weapon-free world*.

Your forthcoming special session begins that year of opportunity. The central committee of the WCC asks that it become a year of cooperation which will reverse the past decade of nuclear deadlock. The committee represents 349 WCC member churches in more than 110 countries.

This world church body is looking for a clear commitment to joint action by the UNSC's permanent members at, or in parallel to, the special session. We suggest that "collective commitment to far greater transparency in reporting on [their] nuclear arsenals would be a welcome first step".

What is "far greater" transparency at this time? We would venture to say it is a level of transparency capable of supporting implementation of the 13 Steps laid out by the NPT Review Conference in 2000. Its first test would be to support the new levels of trust required for urgent completion of Steps 1, 3 & 4, namely, ratification of the CTBT, negotiation of an FMCT, and establishing in the Conference on Disarmament a subsidiary body that actually deals with nuclear disarmament.

Transparency is both feasible and appropriate now as an early sign of forward movement. Greater transparency pursuant to Article VI of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty is long overdue. Transparency by nuclear-weapon states is also indispensable for progress on non-proliferation as well as disarmament.

Churches are among the many groups around the world who welcome the recent rhetorical shift in favour of a world free of nuclear weapons, most especially the ground-breaking speech by the US President on 5 April 2009 in Prague. A high-level Security Council session chaired by President Obama is a propitious time to begin turning opportunity thus created into action.

Our "statement of hope" is attached. We commend your efforts to God in prayer, for the opening now and for the related opportunities that await each of your governments in the year ahead.

Sincerely yours,
Rev. Dr Samuel Kobia
General secretary

- **Joint NGO statement to UN General Assembly First Committee on “Operationalizing the vision of a nuclear weapon free world”, 23 October 2009**

This statement was drafted by several non-government organizations that closely follow the work of First Committee, including the Acronym Institute for Disarmament Diplomacy; the Commission of the Churches on International Affairs, World Council of Churches; the Global Security Institute; the Federation of American Scientists; the Lawyers Committee on Nuclear Policy; Nuclear Age Peace Foundation; Parliamentarians for Nuclear Non-Proliferation and Disarmament; Western States Legal Foundation; and the Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom.

For more than sixty years, civil society has been calling on governments to take action to prohibit and eliminate all nuclear weapons. US President Obama’s pledge in Prague to seek “a world free of nuclear weapons” brought the hope of billions of people to the highest levels of international responsibility.

We have chosen in this statement not to comment in detail on specific resolutions that the First Committee has before it, but to talk about how nuclear disarmament interconnects with other weapons and security challenges in today’s complex security environment and to put forward a few concrete ideas toward operationalising the vision of a world free of nuclear weapons.

First, some interconnections.

At the DPI/NGO conference in Mexico City in September, 1300 participants representing over 340 NGOs from more than 55 countries endorsed a final declaration recognising that security, peace, disarmament, human rights, gender equality, and development are closely interconnected at the local national, regional, and global levels.

One important element underscoring all of these issues is military spending. According to the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, global military expenditure in 2008 is estimated to have totalled \$1464 billion. This represents an increase of 45 per cent in the past ten years. The US military expenditure has reached the highest level in real terms since World War II. It is now responsible for at least 40 per cent of total global military spending.

Nuclear weapons, and the wider global military-industrial complex, consume vast resources that could be put to better use.

Consider just one example. The head of the UN Climate Change Secretariat Yvo De Boer estimated recently that the annual cost of cutting global emissions of greenhouse gases will be \$200 billion. It will cost another US\$100 billion per year to cope with the effects of climate change. This means that just one-fifth of annual global military spending budget can help reduce the scale and worldwide consequences of climate change.

Nuclear weapons cannot help us address climate change, poverty, child mortality, or injustice. Instead, they act as an existential threat to humanity and life on this planet. They also maintain the structural inequalities between the nuclear-armed powers and the

great majority of states, and incite some states to seek nuclear weapons. They support establishments and institutions that see their interests as being well served by a mode of military dominance ultimately underwritten by nuclear weapons. They do not provide security for the citizens of the world.

Civil society groups and many states have long recognized the need to develop more effective resources and tools for security, defence, and conflict resolution than weapons. We advocate pursuit of human security, through the advancement of the interconnected issues above. However, none of the interconnecting issues should be treated as preconditions for nuclear disarmament. In fact, there is no basis for demanding general and complete disarmament or a settlement of all regional disputes as preconditions for eliminating nuclear weapons. The pursuit of nuclear disarmament and achievement of a legally-binding regime that eliminates and prohibits nuclear weapons will greatly facilitate global security and efforts to build peace.

Which leads us to a few suggestions on how to operationalise the vision for a world free of nuclear weapons.

There are many resolutions before you on various aspects of nuclear weapons. We join in supporting many of these efforts, including bringing the CTBT into force, reinforcing the existing nuclear weapon free zones and promoting the establishment of additional zones in Europe and the Arctic as well as the Middle East and North-East Asia, reducing and eliminating strategic and non-strategic arsenals, and fulfilling the NPT disarmament commitments undertaken in 1995 and 2000.

The common factor preventing progress on all these issues is that some governments continue to place high value on nuclear weapons, whether for security, status, or power projection.

When leaders come to the UN General Assembly and Security Council and say they want a nuclear weapon free world, we have to ask how they are changing their policies and doctrines to make this possible. The most conducive path to such a world is for all of the nuclear weapon states to marginalize the role of nuclear weapons in concrete ways, such as by:

- agreeing to legally-binding security assurances not to attack non-nuclear weapon states with nuclear weapons;
- committing not to use nuclear weapons as a tool for “pre-emptive strike”;
- rejecting counterforce and counter-value doctrines; and
- excluding “extended deterrence” arrangements in their doctrines;
- declaring that as a matter of national policy they will not design, develop, or produce new design nuclear warheads or modernize existing warheads.

Trading some arms control agreements or arsenal reduction for modernised nuclear weapons research and production facilities capable of building the nuclear threat anew is not disarmament. If the danger of nuclear war is to be eliminated, ceasing to plan and build for an eternal nuclear threat must come early, not late, in the process. The “nuclear danger” does not come from without, but from within. To seek to “hedge” against the

nuclear threat only perpetuates it, sustaining the global climate of fear and distrust that makes real disarmament progress always a receding goal.

To this end, it is good that the United States and Russian Federation have returned to the negotiating table to replace START. The NPT Review Conference should include commitment to further bilateral reductions. In the next round, the United States and Russian Federation should each cut their deployed and stored nuclear weapons and delivery systems to at least the low hundreds. This would facilitate multilateral negotiations on elimination. They should also cut their nuclear weapon budgets in half and commit to zero funding for any modernization or refurbishment programmes.

Furthermore, it is important not to be mesmerized by negotiations, which can be derailed by domestic or international developments. The United States and Russia, and other states with nuclear weapons, can and should undertake unilateral reductions, as the 13 Practical Steps provide.

Many non-nuclear weapon states also have a role to play. Thirty non-nuclear weapon states shelter under the US nuclear umbrella. Citizens in NATO countries, Australia, South Korea, and Japan have long advocated for their countries to let go of the cold war nuclear umbrellas and forge more independent and balanced relationships for national, regional, and international security. Now key legislators from all these countries are joining the call. We urge governments to heed these calls and act to denuclearise their alliances and relations with other states. Many proponents of retaining nuclear weapons in the United States espouse “extended deterrence” as their justification. Public statements from governments under the US nuclear umbrella stating that they believe their security commitments will still be viable without nuclear weapons would thus remove a key obstacle to deeper reductions in the US nuclear arsenal. Removing nuclear sharing from NATO’s Strategic Concept, combined with removal of nuclear weapons from Europe, would be an important confidence-building measure and would likely facilitate bilateral dialogue that could lead to much deeper cuts in the US and Russian nuclear arsenals.

Like many of you, we welcomed that the UN Security Council held a special session this September on nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation. While Resolution 1887 included concrete operational commitments to help prevent nuclear proliferation and other kinds of nuclear insecurity, it failed to include similarly concrete measures to advance disarmament. Disarmament cannot take a back seat to non-proliferation, nor can measures undertaken to prevent proliferation be considered acts of disarmament.

We hope that the cooperation forged among the P5 in the drafting of this resolution will continue and grow to engage non-nuclear weapon states, and that the P5 and other nuclear weapon possessors will find similar unity of purpose in implementing specific disarmament measures.

To this end, all states interested in serious nuclear disarmament should, *inter alia*:

- Oppose conditioning approval of the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT) on deals for entrenching and expanding weapons complexes, on retaining the option of designing and manufacturing modified or new-design warheads, or

- on modernizing delivery systems. They should also call for the closure of all nuclear test sites.
- Negotiate for a fissile materials treaty that comprehensively prevents use of existing materials outside military programs for weapons acquisition and that facilitates disarmament.
- Immediately and forcefully convey to nuclear weapon possessors that they must reduce the role of nuclear weapons in their security doctrines and in international relations.
- Support UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon's call, in his five-point plan for nuclear disarmament, for the possession of any weapon of mass destruction to be considered a 'global taboo'.
- Emphasize that it would be a crime against humanity if anyone were to use nuclear weapons, anywhere in the world, for any purpose whatsoever. In this context, we applaud the decision of the International Committee of the Red Cross to speak out on nuclear weapons during this First Committee session.
- Commit to the objective of a Nuclear Weapons Convention and begin the process that will lead towards this objective. Those that are states parties to the NPT should put this commitment into their statements and papers to the 2010 Review Conference and push for it to be included in any final documents.

Civil society experts developed a model Nuclear Weapons Convention some years ago as a resource and guide, with suggestions and options for how to prohibit, reduce, and eliminate nuclear weapons safely and securely, while providing insurance against future break-outs. This model Convention has been circulated by the Secretary-General as an official UN document.

There are some who say that it is premature to consider a Nuclear Weapons Convention at this time. Work on a Nuclear Weapons Convention will ensure full implementation of the NPT and help facilitate nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation steps.

Abolishing nuclear weapons will help move the world away from a system of competing nation-states seeking military advantage and open the way to putting real, equitable, environmentally sustainable, human security interests at the centre of national policies.

Victor Hugo wrote that: "More powerful than the march of mighty armies is an idea whose time has come." The idea whose time has come is that the abolition of nuclear weapons is not only desirable, but possible, achievable, practical, and urgently necessary.

- **Joint letter to leaders of NATO and the European Union concerning NATO nuclear policy, 28 October 2009**

Letter sent to:

- H.E. Mr Anders Fogh Rasmussen, NATO secretary general
- H.E. Mr Fredrik Reinfeldt, prime minister of Sweden, Swedish Presidency of the European Union
- H.E. Mr Javier Solana, secretary-general of the Council of the European Union/high representative for the Common Foreign and Security Policy
- The Honorable Barack Obama, president of the United States of America
- H.E. Mr Dimitry Medvedev, president of the Russian Federation

Your Excellencies,

We are writing to leaders of NATO and of the European Union in follow-up to our 30 March 2009 joint letter concerning NATO nuclear policy and its current strategic concept review. We are also writing to US President Barack Obama and Russian President Dimitry Medvedev as leaders of the states with more than 95 percent of the world's nuclear weapons.

The new political dynamic for nuclear disarmament figures in public statements recently issued by our councils, which represent nearly 200 member churches in North America and Europe. Referring to these statements by our governing bodies, we:

- Strongly affirm the joint statement by US President Obama and Russian President Medvedev on 1 April 2009 in London and the US president's appeal for a world free of nuclear weapons on 5 April 2009 in Prague.
- Look to the US and Russia to take an important early step toward that goal in the new START follow-on agreement.
- Call for NATO to respond in kind, with a clear endorsement of the new call for a nuclear-weapon-free world and by deciding in NATO's new Strategic Concept that nuclear sharing should be ended and US nuclear weapons based in NATO's non-nuclear-weapon member states should be eliminated.
- Call for the European Union to equally endorse the new call for a nuclear-weapon-free world in the EU Common Position for the 2010 NPT Review Conference, also reflecting that the EU includes two nuclear-weapon states and four member states with nuclear weapons on their soil.
- Call for Russia to address its vast number of tactical nuclear weapons and resume the hopeful process of unilateral reductions started in 1991 by both the US and the Soviet Union/Russia.

You will find the texts of the three statements enclosed. One of the issuing bodies, the Conference of European Churches, met under the theme 'Called to One Hope in Christ'. Members looked for new developments that raise hope in the world. We believe the new

striving to abolish nuclear weapons is such a sign. We send you the statements as encouragements to pursue this new course.

We acknowledge the steps NATO has taken to reduce its reliance on nuclear weapons, as respondents to our earlier letter to NATO leaders noted. We also welcome the commitment of the new German government to have all nuclear weapons withdrawn from its soil.

Now is the time to continue the trend. Every state has a part to play in breaking out of the self-fulfilling logic so often cited, that "we will need nuclear weapons as long as others have them". We appeal to all nuclear-weapon states and states with nuclear weapons on their soil to contribute to progress under the new political dynamic.

It is our conviction that the present opportunity must be transformed into conclusive actions.

Sincerely,

Rev. Dr Samuel Kobia, general secretary, World Council of Churches
The Venerable Colin Williams, general secretary, Conference of European Churches
Rev. Michael Kinnamon, Ph.D., general secretary, National Council of the Churches of Christ in the USA
The Rev. Dr Karen Hamilton, general secretary, The Canadian Council of Churches

- **Letter from WCC general secretary to the governments of North and South Korea, Japan, China, Russia and the US, urging the United States of America and the Democratic People's Republic of Korea to hold bilateral talks within the context of the resumed Six-Party Talks on North Korea's nuclear programme, 12 November 2009**

Excellencies,

I take this opportunity to write to you all as heads of state government that are involved in the Six-Party Talks related to issues on the Korean peninsula. I have had an opportunity to lead a World Council of Churches delegation to visit the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) from 17 to 20 October 2009 at the invitation of the Korean Christian Federation. This visit was also an opportunity for me and my delegation to meet with the president of the Supreme People's Assembly of the DPRK, Mr Kim Yong-nam, and other government officials who were present at the meeting.

Immediately after the DPRK visit I participated in an international consultation we organized on "Peace, Reconciliation and Reunification of the Korean Peninsula", which was held in Hong Kong from 21 to 23 October 2009. This international consultation, attended by 137 participants from more than 30 countries, included representatives from

WCC member churches from each country in the Six-Party Talks. The member churches of the WCC have pursued peace and reconciliation in the Korean peninsula for several decades. In fact, in 1984 the WCC began a process to establish engagement and dialogue for peace and reconciliation in response to the peace and security on the Korean peninsula.

For the past 25 years through this initiative, the WCC has accompanied churches on the Korean peninsula and beyond in opening dialogue and contact which helped facilitate direct contact between North and South Koreans generate understanding, build confidence and trust, develop relationships and open avenues for constructive service in North and South Korea, who are burdened by this prolonged conflict. Through our various involvements in both North and South Korea we have been convinced that the people of both Koreas have a compelling longing for peace and a wish that their respective governments pursue peace with direct engagement between all parties in order to build confidence, relationships and constructive actions for the well-being, dignity and security of all the people of the Korean peninsula.

Excellencies, we want to convey to you the alarm and disappointment we feel concerning the breakdown of the Six-Party Talks, which also lead to actions that escalate tensions and confrontation, recently and repeatedly. Our attention and prayers are drawn at this time to the urgency of the resumption of the Six-Party Talks in a manner that is comprehensive and conclusive. We urge each of you to return to the negotiating table prepared to deal with the difficult but eminently solvable issues before you. We especially express our considered opinion on the importance of all parties demonstrating good faith in negotiations and in the implementation and verification of what has been agreed. We value the responses we receive from time to time which demonstrate that our sentiments are shared by many in civil society, at the national and international levels.

Given the resurgent vision of a world free of nuclear weapons, it is time to make the Korean peninsula a setting for disarmament success rather than a focus of regional instability and international failure. Given the fact that five of the six parties are recognized nuclear-weapon-states or are protected by such states, it is difficult to resolve in isolation the evident commitment of the DPRK in adopting a similar, armaments-driven posture. We are of the opinion that initial and continuing steps toward a nuclear-weapon-free world, under the terms of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, would greatly facilitate progress in the Six-Party Talks in the short term and would act as a unique safeguard against the erosion of any new agreements. The most convincing steps imaginable at present would be taking bold and concrete steps towards a nuclear-weapon-free Korean peninsula and ultimately a nuclear-weapon-free zone in Northeast Asia. As an incentive for progress of this calibre, we urge that direct talks between the United States of America (USA) and the DPRK need to be undertaken in the context of the Six-Party Talks. Such engagement must be set in motion at the earliest, as it needs to be seen as an essential part of multilateral success and the prelude for the much larger decisions which would lead to ultimate peace and security on the Korean peninsula.

Excellencies, we are aware of the fact that negotiations which could build a lasting peace in the Korean peninsula are within your governments' power. This letter is an encouragement to hold bilateral talks between the DPRK and the USA and to commence multilateral engagement between all other countries involved in the Six Party Talks – the DPRK, the US, the Republic of Korea, the People's Republic of China, the Russian Federation and Japan.

Sincerely yours,
Rev. Dr Samuel Kobia
General secretary

UNITED NATIONS RELATIONS

- **Statement on the United Nations Peacebuilding Commission, adopted by WCC executive committee, Bossey, Switzerland, 27 February–2 March 2007**

1. The United Nations established a Peacebuilding Commission in December 2005, as an intergovernmental advisory body to help countries in post-conflict peace building recovery, reconstruction and development. On 11th October 2006, the Commission took a major step forward when a Peacebuilding fund with a target of US\$250 million was launched at the United Nations headquarter.
2. The establishment of the Fund represents a major step forward in the United Nations Peacebuilding efforts and reflects a commitment by the international community to undertake sustained engagement in countries emerging from conflicts. The then Secretary General of the United Nations, Kofi Annan, at the launching of the Fund said: “the international community now has at its disposal a new and well-designed Peacebuilding platform. Used well, it can help countries avoid a relapse into conflict, and enable them to regain – or find for the first time – the path to peace”.
3. The Peacebuilding Commission is designed to support post-conflict stabilization initiatives, such as implementation of peace agreements and prevention of the recurrence of conflict. It will also help better co-ordination of various capacities and expertise, as well as benefit by all the UN experience on such matters as conflict prevention, mediation, peacekeeping, respect for human rights, the rule of law, humanitarian assistance, reconstruction and long term development. Specifically, the Commission will: a) propose integrated strategies for post conflict Peacebuilding and recovery; b) help to ensure predictable financing for early recovery; c) extend the period of attention by the international community to post conflict recovery; d) develop best practices on issues that require extensive collaboration among political, military and humanitarian development actors.
4. The World Council of Churches has a longstanding commitment to peace and reconciliation, and to heal broken communities in order to build a culture of peace. The WCC central committee meeting in Geneva, 26th August to 3 September 1999, in its message – The Decade to Overcome Violence (DOV), Churches seeking Reconciliation and Peace – stated:

“We offer with the Decade to Overcome Violence a truly ecumenical space, a safe space for encounter, mutual recognition, and common action. We will strive together to overcome the spirit, logic and practice of violence. We will work together to be agents of reconciliation and peace with justice in homes, churches and communities as well as in political, social and economic structures at

national, international levels. We will cooperate to build a culture of peace that is based on just and sustainable communities”.

The central committee's message coincided with the United Nations “Decade for Culture of Peace and non-Violence for the Children of the World”. The two initiatives were meant to motivate and strengthen each other.

5. The World Council of Churches and its members have witnessed the trauma of people in post-conflict situations and have accompanied and supported suffering communities in these and other situations. It was in light of these experiences that the statement on UN Reform issued at the 9th general assembly 14-23 February 2006, Porto Alegre, Brazil:
6. “Welcomed the establishment of the Peacebuilding Commission as a means of developing new and appropriate ways of responding to civil conflict. The Peacebuilding Commission should adopt and endorse Peacebuilding principles and practices, which emphasize local ownership in Peacebuilding and peacekeeping processes. These should also promote the full participation of women (in accordance with the UN Security Council Resolution 1325). At the same time current disarmament forums and mechanism must be strengthened and made more effective”.

The executive committee of the World Council of Churches meeting in Geneva, 27th February to 2nd March 2006:

- a. **recognizes** the contribution made by the United Nations, over the years, in Peacebuilding and peacekeeping activities in different regions of the world and expresses the need to preserve and build on these achievements by evaluating the existing approaches instruments and mechanism, including the organs of the UN system;
- b. **appreciates** the establishment of the Peacebuilding Commission that will mobilise and channel resources at the disposal of the international community to advise and propose integrated strategies for post-conflict recovery, focussing attention on reconstruction, institution building and sustainable development in countries emerging from conflicts;
- c. **emphasizes** the importance of participation of regional and local actors, and stresses the importance of adopting flexible working methods to ensure the active participation of those affected by the conflict in the deliberations of the Commission;
- d. **reiterates** the need to recognize the role and contribution of the churches and civil society organization, engaged in peace building activities;
- e. **urges** member churches to encourage and support the efforts of the Peacebuilding Commission, in post-conflict situations, in strengthening the links between peace and security, democracy and good governance;

- f. *calls on* member states to provide full moral, material and human resources backing and support to ensure the successful functioning of the Peacebuilding Commission.

- **WCC participation in 60th World Health Assembly, 14-23 May 2007**

WCC supports proposal for rational use of medicines

The World Council of Churches (WCC) has welcomed a resolution on rational use of medicines to be considered by the 60th World Health Assembly taking place in Geneva 14-23 May 2007.

"It is of paramount importance that civil society and faith communities promote the concept of rational use of medicines and demand its application for the benefit of all," says Dr Manoj Kurian, WCC programme executive for health and healing. According to Kurian, who is a medical doctor, "Only this can counter the current trend of a pharmaceutical industry driven by market forces rather than by the needs of the majority."

The annual global market of medicines is above USD 550 billion and, according to the World Health Organization (WHO), more than half the medicines used in developing countries and those with economies in transition, and a substantial proportion of medicines, particularly antibiotics, in developed countries are used inappropriately.

According to some estimates, almost nine out of every ten dollars spent in Africa on medicines are lost due to poor management and poor patient compliance. "It is a scandal that billions of dollars are blown away through the window while easy mechanisms to prevent that from happening are known," says Albert Petersen, chair of the board of the Ecumenical Pharmaceutical Network (EPN).

The irrational use of medicines leads to poor results and can harm patients. In particular, antimicrobial resistance due to inappropriate overuse of antibiotics is increasing dramatically worldwide, causing significant morbidity and mortality, and thus becoming a threat to global health security.

According to the WHO, medicines are rationally employed when they are used in a therapeutically sound and cost-effective way by health professionals and consumers in order to maximize their potential in health care. This includes the elimination of over-use, under-use, and lack of adherence to treatment.

The WHO Executive Board resolution on rational use of medicines (EB129.R12), to be considered by the Assembly in its current session, focuses on the establishment of national multidisciplinary programmes mandated to coordinate policies on medicine use and monitor their impact.

The resolution also recommends implementing, on the basis of treatments of choice, lists of essential medicines for use in drug procurement and insurance reimbursement; eliminating perverse financial incentives that lead to irrational prescribing; and enforcing appropriate regulation to ensure that medicinal promotion and advertising are in keeping with WHO ethical criteria.

According to Eva Ombaka, coordinator of the EPN, "If accepted, this resolution would enable the WHO to assist member states to take concrete steps on better use of medicines. Which in turn would save public and private resources as well as save lives through better therapy and reduce occurrence of diseases arising from wrong use of medicines. All this applies, not only to the so-called developing countries, but also to the developed countries."

These views were expressed at a joint briefing held yesterday by WHO officials and representatives of the EPN, Health Action International (HAI), Action on Antibiotic Resistance (REACT) and the WCC in order to promote a deeper understanding of the resolution amongst the delegates to the Assembly.

The World Health Assembly is the supreme decision-making body of the WHO. Attended by delegations from the 193 member states, it meets in Geneva in May each year to determine the policies of the organization. In its 60th edition, the Assembly is to consider resolutions recommended by the WHO Executive Board on the rational use of medicines, among other issues.

The WCC's health and healing project is facilitating the participation at the Assembly of some 80 representatives of grassroots organizations working on health issues.

To the chairman of Committee B
Technical Working group Resolution EB 120.R12, Item: 12/17
Title: Churches advocating for rational use of medicine

Speaker: Dr Eva M.A.Ombaka

Contact Information: mobile: +254 724 301755 / Email: epn@wananchi.org

Chairman, honourable delegates of the World Health Assembly,

More than 25 years ago the Christian Medical Commission of World Council of Churches introduced its Pharmaceutical Programme. Today the Ecumenical Pharmaceutical Network as the programme is known and recognized, has members in almost all sub-Saharan Countries in Africa and works closely with several UN organizations including WHO. Members of the Network contribute to key discussion in such bodies as the WHO Expert committees, bringing to the table issues that arise from the grass roots level.

In collaboration with WHO, EPN evaluated 16 drug supply organizations in 11 African countries; the findings show that these DSOs are linked to more than 8000 hospitals and clinics. It is also known that churches in Sub-Sahara Africa provide about 40 % of the formal health care services, especially in the rural areas.

EPN's mission is to strengthen the pharmaceutical services in these institutions, and therefore, access to essential medicines, quality of products and services. Within this rational use of medicines is key to our work.

It is a matter of great concern for us that today, 30 years after introducing the excellent concept of Essential Medicines by WHO, still about 50% of the people living in Sub-Sahara countries don't have access to basic drugs. Even worse, is the fact that of those who do have access to medicines, more than half of them receive medicines in an irrational manner. Poor practices result in huge wastage in the areas of procurement, distribution, storage, prescribing and use. For example, as shown by World Bank, from 100 Dollar allocated for medicines, an equivalent of \$12-worth of drugs is effectively used. Surely a waste of up to 88% of limited resources cannot be allowed to continue.

What can be done?

Multiple interventions to address irrational use of medicines are known to work as has been shown by WHO studies and from the International Conferences on Improving Use of Medicines (ICIUM). It has also been shown that a coordinated national approach to implementing activities, works. For example, the misuse of antibiotics and emerging resistance is a major problem today. Yet Sweden, through its national program, managed to reduce its antibiotic use by 25% in 7 years. Antibiotic use in children was reduced by 40% mainly by decreasing their use in coughs and colds! Similar positive drug use successes have been observed in Oman. Unfortunately, these working interventions are often not implemented. Perhaps they are not known. Often, however, they are not put into practise because of lack of resources, a support system, monitoring and feedback mechanisms, political will, or a forum to bring together all the different stakeholders.

We are encouraged by the WHA resolution EB120.R12 which addresses these shortcomings. In particular, it calls for establishing multidisciplinary national bodies to monitor the use of medicines and to run national programmes on promoting rational use of medicines. EPN is therefore strongly advocating on behalf of millions of patients world-wide for this resolution and call on members states to carry this forward in their national plans.

EPN members commit to playing our part: working closely and supporting the national bodies to implement national plans of action at national level and within our own institutions. Thus together, we will achieve our aim for better therapy outcomes for all the people that are in need of medicines. In this way, we save not only money, but more importantly, peoples' lives.

Christian Medical Commission (CMC) Churches' Action for Health
Agenda item: 12.20 (Public Health, Innovation and Intellectual Property)
Read by Mr Thiru Balasubramaniam

Thank you Chair,

This statement is made on behalf of the Christian Medical Commission (CMC) Churches' Action for Health and other organizations including Knowledge Ecology International (KEI), Health Action International and the Médecins sans Frontières – Access to Essential Medicines Campaign.

As this is the first World Health Assembly under the helm of director-general Margaret Chan, we welcome her new commitment to personally engage in the work of the WHO's Inter-governmental Working Group on Public Health, Innovation and Intellectual Property (IGWG/PHI). Lack of WHO leadership so far has been a problem. We believe Dr Chan's leadership is essential at this moment.

As the United Nations' specialized agency for health, the WHO has created the IGWG to address the issues of both innovation and access – a mission that some describe as “I+ A.” This is new, to find models to support both innovation and access, recognizing that both matter.

The IGWG has been asked to implement the recommendations of the WHO's CIPIH. These include several recommendations on the need to protect access, such as through the use of compulsory and voluntary licensing of patents for generic competition in order to obtain affordable products. We support the suggestions of many NGOs and governments to consider the creation of patent pools to enable the scaling up of such activities.

The IGWG has also agreed to address the need for new approaches to stimulating R&D for diseases that disproportionately impact poor people living in poor countries.

The IGWG's terms of reference calls for a new WHO role in setting research priorities, identifying funding needs, and sustainable sources of financing. It cannot fulfil its mission to address issues of access unless it considers new approaches to funding the research.

We support the text of the draft resolution presented by Brazil that calls upon the WHO:

To encourage the development of proposals for a health needs-driven R&D system for discussion at the IGWG that separates paying for the cost of R&D from the price of drugs;

One example of this approach was the proposal at a January 2007 meeting on TB drug development organized by Médecins sans Frontières, supported by the Weill Cornell Medical College in New York, where the participants endorsed the idea of an R&D treaty for sustainable sources for financing for R&D for diseases like TB. The participants

suggested to the IGWG to develop proposals that de-link incentives for R&D from drug prices, instead rewarding the impact of inventions according to health care outcomes.

Another proposal by KEI would be to take a proportion of the Global Fund budget for drug purchases to fund a prize fund that would reward developers of 2nd generation drugs in return for licensing their inventions to a patent pool that would facilitate generic competition for products.

The role of the public should be augmented. The IGWG should invite web based submissions on matter of substance and procedures, on an ongoing basis, rather than once a year.

As noted by one country delegate, the IGWG is a critical opportunity for human genius to devise humane, innovative solutions for fostering innovation for health problems and reconciling this objective with access. Among civil society, a group of NGOs have set up an “Innovation + Access” coalition to collaboratively brainstorm on the new paradigms, and to provide technical support to country delegations.

We trust the spirit of Geneva will guide this august body to an expeditious and equitable outcome.

Thank you Chair.

- **Oral Intervention on Item 4 of the UN Human Rights Council regarding extrajudicial executions in the Philippines, 24 September 2007**

In a Joint Statement with:

Asia Pacific Forum on Women Law and Development

Asian Human Rights Commission

Unrepresented Nations and Peoples Organization

The following text was presented to the UN Human Rights Council on 24 September by Marie Hilao-Enriquez, a WCC accredited delegate from the Philippines.

This statement is supported by the World Council of Churches, the Asia Pacific Forum on Women, Law and Development, the Asian Human Rights Commission and the Unrepresented Nations and Peoples Organization. The entire Philippine NGO delegation expresses our thanks to them.

In March of this year, the UN special rapporteur Prof. Philip Alston reported his initial findings on the extrajudicial executions in the Philippines and we were glad that the government finally allowed such visit although government officials assailed Prof. Alston’s initial report.

On several occasions, the Philippine government has announced that it has implemented measures to address the issue as well as other violations in the country. We most

respectfully posit that these measures did not and will not resolve the killings. As Mr Alston in his report last March correctly pointed out, the question of resources or technical expertise will partly resolve the killings but “the strong risk is that these measures will treat only some of the symptoms of the crisis, and will fail to address meaningfully two of the most important underlying causes of a great many of the killings.” (A/HRC/4/20/Add.3, March 22, 2007)

Professor Philip Alston went on to identify these two underlying causes as ‘vilification’, ‘labelling’, or guilt by association”, which “involves the characterization of most groups on the left of the political spectrum as ‘front organizations’ for armed groups whose aim is to destroy democracy” thereby rendering such groups to be “accordingly considered to be legitimate targets. The second cause is the extent to which aspects of the Government’s counter-insurgency strategy encourage or facilitate the extrajudicial killings of activists and other ‘enemies’ in certain circumstances.”

In fact, from January to July 2007, there were 60 cases of extrajudicial executions, from January to June 2007 there were 17 cases of disappearances, 12 cases of torture, 113 cases of illegal arrests and thousands became victims of forced evacuation. We fear that the situation will exacerbate with the implementation of the Anti-Terror Law on July 15, of this year.

Among the Philippine NGO delegation now here in Geneva for this session is Mrs Edita Burgos, mother of Jonas Burgos, an agriculturist helping farmers in the country. Jonas was abducted on April 28 of this year and up to now he remains missing. That is why Mrs Burgos and other members of our NGO delegation made the long trip here to Geneva to beseech this Council to prevail upon the Philippine government to make good its commitments in the pledges it made to the General Assembly when it sought reelection to this Council in May of this year.

Mr President, on September 21, the Filipino people recalled the imposition of martial law in our country 35 years ago in 1972. The impunity by which violations were committed by state security forces at that time continues to this day even as martial law survivors have not been recognized and indemnified by this administration which just made promises to do so.

No perpetrator of such heinous crimes against humanity of that dictatorial period has ever been punished to this day. We hope that the same will not be applied by Pres. Arroyo to the violators under her watch.

Again, to quote Mr Alston, “these recommendations [measures that government has undertaken to address the killings] will make little difference unless there is a fundamental change of heart on the part of the military or the emergence of civilian resolve to compel the military to change its ways. Then, and only then, will it be possible to make real progress in ending the killings.”

Mr President, our country has long been depicted as a democracy in Southeast Asia and as such it must be compelled to adhere to human rights standards and international humanitarian laws. It must resolve cases of human rights violations and render justice to victims. We hope that the Human Rights Council bear this record in mind when the Philippine government is reviewed under the UPR.

I thank you Mr President.

- **UN and WCC general secretaries reaffirm commitment to strong and close collaboration, 29 October 2007**

The United Nations and the World Council of Churches (WCC) have reaffirmed their commitment to collaborate at a meeting between the general secretaries of both organizations held on 29 October at the UN headquarters in New York.

"As the UN faces the 21st century highlighting the interrelatedness of development, security and human rights, the WCC strongly believes multilateralism is the only way to respond to the challenges of today," said WCC general secretary Samuel Kobia at the meeting. That is why the WCC is committed "to the principles and purposes of the UN".

UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon expressed "deep appreciation for the work of the WCC". He said the Council is a key member of the UN constituency, given not only what it means in terms of worldwide church representation, but also the common objectives shared by the two organizations and the "significant contribution made by the WCC in the areas of democracy and human rights".

"It was a good and constructive first meeting as both leaders expressed their desire to continue strong and close collaboration," said Rev. Christopher Ferguson, WCC representative to the United Nations in New York.

The meeting took place at the beginning of the WCC's United Nations Advocacy Week taking place 29 October – 2 November at the Church Center to the UN, in New York. Kobia thanked Ban for the participation of several UN officials who are contributing to the week-long discussions attended by some 80 church leaders, policy and advocacy officers of churches and ecumenical organizations from all over the world.

Among the issues on the organizations' common agenda, the two general secretaries discussed climate change, "one of the most critical challenges the world faces today," as Kobia put it. He shared with Ban the concern of the Council's member churches in the Pacific, which are "already preparing for the evacuation of entire populations" from some small islands to the bigger ones.

Affirming the interrelatedness of the concerns about the integrity of creation, justice and peace, Kobia brought to the attention of the UN secretary general some of the issues on the churches' advocacy agenda, namely the situation in the greater Horn of Africa, nuclear disarmament, the struggle for peace in the Middle East, as well as the work to

overcome poverty and economic injustice, closely related to the UN Millennium Development Goals.

In view of the conviction that "religion has a big, positive role to play in the search for global peace and harmony," the WCC general secretary announced the Council's intention to propose that the UN declare a "Decade of Interreligious Dialogue and Cooperation for Peace". The proposal would be submitted to the UN together with an international consultative group in the course of the coming year.

The WCC general secretary was accompanied by Ambassador Dr Park Kyung Seo, director of the North East Asia Peace Institute; Rev. Elenora Giddings-Ivory, recently appointed WCC director of Public Witness; and WCC staff members Dr Guillermo Kerber, Dr Mathews George Chunakara, and Rev. Christopher Ferguson.

- **UN and WCC general secretaries forge closer partnership on climate change and democracy issues, 3 March 2008**

In a wide-ranging discussion at the Geneva-based World Council of Churches (WCC) the UN secretary general, H.E. Ban Ki-Moon and WCC general secretary, Rev. Dr Samuel Kobia found agreement for the two world bodies to work more closely on several global issues, particularly climate change.

"Global warming will only be resolved through a global common response and we need your help," Ban Ki-Moon said to Kobia and several staff gathered.

The UN leader was visiting the WCC offices at the invitation of Kobia. The two had previously met in New York last October.

Kobia opened the meeting with a brief description of how WCC and its member churches are working to mobilize churches toward a better understanding of the impact of global warming and the need to follow through beyond the Kyoto Protocol.

"We welcome your visit to the Antarctica to see the climate change issue first hand," Kobia said. "It was a powerful testimony."

"Working on global warming is a matter of faith," Kobia said. "You can count on the WCC as a strong partner in acting together now for the sake of humankind and the rest of creation."

"We would like to maintain a close partnership with the WCC," Ban Ki-Moon said. "You have high moral power and what you are doing is based on your Christian beliefs."

Saying he was very familiar with the work of the WCC he added that the WCC had played an important role in the democratization of Korea.

Ban Ki-Moon is the first UN chief from Korea.

The discussion broadened into the issue of democratic electoral processes with references by Kobia to Kenya and more recently the upheaval in Armenia. "I want to thank you for helping in Kenya as you did," Kobia, who is also a Kenyan pastor, said.

Ban Ki-Moon described how he plans to place a focus on the issues of intolerance which have led to some of the struggles and violence surrounding electoral processes.

"This is another area where the WCC can make a contribution," he said. "The world has suffered for too long with intolerances."

Kobia said the WCC work on interreligious dialogue and cooperation promotes understanding and tolerance between people of different faiths.

He also announced that the WCC and its member churches in Africa are planning for monitoring of the upcoming elections in Zimbabwe 29 March.

"Your spirit of caring is based in Christianity," Ban Ki-Moon said. "I am glad the WCC is one of the strong partners of the UN."

Following the discussions the leaders attended a short prayer service for peace in the WCC chapel before Ban Ki-Moon returned to the UN offices which are nearby the WCC.

- **Letter from WCC general secretary to H.E. Mr Ban Ki-moon, UN secretary general, expressing appreciation for the efforts and leadership he demonstrated, both in helping solve the humanitarian crisis in Myanmar arising from cyclone Nargis and in visiting the earthquake-stricken Sichuan Province in China, 3 June 2008**

Your Excellency,

Greetings from the World Council of Churches.

I am writing in order to convey to you our deep appreciation and gratitude for your tireless efforts and leadership in helping to solve the humanitarian crises in Myanmar arising in various parts of that country as the result of the recent disastrous cyclone Nargis. It was with a great sense of satisfaction that we received news of the agreement reached during your visit to Myanmar between you and the head of the military government, General Than Shwe. We are hopeful that this paves the way to allow foreign relief workers to operate in the worst affected areas, irrespective of their nationalities.

Your Excellency, the courage and commitment you have demonstrated in negotiating with the ruling military leadership of Myanmar and the promise of an immediate positive outcome as a result of the agreement, is a life-saving breakthrough for millions of people

in the areas devastated by the cyclone. You put the situation into perspective during your visit when you told the people of Myanmar that *“we work hard in our lives for ourselves and our families and then in a moment, it is gone.”* You continued with words of encouragement: *“I’m humbled, humbled by the scale of this natural disaster, the worst your country has ever experienced, and humbled by the courage and resilience of the Myanmar people.”* Your words, your physical presence and your success in negotiating with the regime have provided a great consolation for millions of people who have been mourning and suffering such enormous loss.

Your Excellency, I would also like to express my deep appreciation for your expression of solidarity in visiting earthquake-stricken Sichuan Province in the People’s Republic of China. In fact, your visits to Myanmar and China will be not only a consolation for the people in these affected countries; they also enhance the morale of the international community as we join with all those trying to find the way forward to save lives and prevent further hardship.

For your information, Your Excellency, let me share with you that ever since the news about the cyclone in Myanmar and the earthquake in China were reported, we in the World Council of Churches (WCC) have been in touch with our friends and colleagues in both countries and have joined them along with WCC members all over the world in prayer. The emergency relief and humanitarian aid arm of the WCC, Action By Churches Together (ACT), which is based in Geneva, has mobilized its members in various countries to assist people in both Myanmar and China. We will continue to be engaged in a long-term response and process of joining hands with many others who are extending relief and rehabilitation assistance.

Once again, we offer our appreciation and thanks for your leadership and timely intervention.

Yours sincerely,
Rev. Dr Samuel Kobia
General secretary

WOMEN

- **Statement on International Women's day, 8 March 2009, WCC executive committee, Bossey, Switzerland, 17-20 February 2009**

The International Women's Day (IWD)⁴⁷ was born one hundred years ago from the National Women's Day (USA) as one response by women to their reality of oppression and inequality in economy and suffrage. As a vibrant movement for change, it has since spread to all the corners of the world. A century later IWD remains an occasion in which women and men celebrate women's contributions and achievements while identifying the challenges women continue to face. Women in the churches have, in many parts of the world, joined in celebrations with other women's groups to mark this day. It has provided a time for Christian women to celebrate their gifts to the churches, to call on the churches to become even more inclusive and to recognize the significant role women play in many of their ministries.

Since the inception of the World Council of Churches (WCC) in 1948, the churches have together expressed in many ways their commitment to women and acknowledgement of the role and participation of women in the life of the churches. This position has been based on the affirmation by churches from different traditions that women have equal dignity with men as representations of the image of God, *imago Dei* (Genesis 1:27). With such an affirmation, therefore, women have participated as equal partakers in redemption, co-workers in God's creation and in the Church's mission.

At the WCC's 9th Assembly in 2006, this commitment came to fruition when the WCC elected its main governing bodies, now composed of 40% women. We are encouraged that this wind of change sweeps through many of the WCC's member churches too, and in many places women's leadership is now a given.

“Unite to end violence against women” is the thematic focus for this year's IWD. According to UN reports,⁴⁸ violence against women and children remains the main barrier to the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). During the 2004 International Affairs and Advocacy Week at the UN, the WCC called all its global member churches to take responsibility for mobilizing locally and advocating for the fulfilment of the UN Millennium Development Goals (MDGs⁴⁹) at the national

⁴⁷ For information on the history of the International Women's Day, see <http://www.internationalwomensday.com/about.asp>.

⁴⁸ Open, <http://www.who.int/gender/documents/MDGs&VAWSep05.pdf>; <http://www.undp.org/women/docs/mdgs-genderlens.pdf>; and http://www.unfpa.org/webdav/site/global/shared/documents/publications/2009/2009_add_gen_vio.pdf.

⁴⁹ MDGs are used as basic guidelines for the achievement of development for ensuring a healthy society. One of the common criticisms of MDGs is that they are a “top down” process, which excludes local authority and other stakeholders; for example, they confuse the question of who really sets the agenda for fighting poverty, and whose

government level. Such advocacy must include initiatives to address violence against women and children. To this effect, therefore, the WCC's Decade to Overcome Violence (DOV) has presented an opportunity to address, among other conflict-related issues, all forms of violence against women and children.

The WCC executive committee, meeting at Bossey Switzerland 17-20 February 2009:

A. *Invites* its member churches to be outspoken against the continuing manifestations of violence against women and children in:

- Gender disparities and imbalances expressed in women's struggle to attain adequate education and to access micro-finance loans.
- The gross economic injustices women and children face in most societies; for example, poor and unequal working conditions for women.
- The untold suffering and pain inflicted by political and economic turmoil often deliberately caused by national and international policies.
- The feminization of poverty, HIV and AIDS
- Rising numbers of women who lose their lives through maternal deaths, especially in the global south.⁵⁰
- Increasing numbers of women and girls forced by wars, economic crises and environmental destruction to seek better prospects outside their villages and countries.
- Significant numbers of women and girls involved in and sometimes victims of illegal trafficking.
- Young girls forced into early marriages and therefore made vulnerable to the risk of early pregnancies, some of which contribute to early maternal deaths.
- Rising numbers of women and girls who are raped and sexually mutilated in war zones.
- Female genital mutilation, which is still practiced in some areas, in the name of religion or related misconceptions concerning what marriage entails to women and girls.
- Racism, xenophobia and sexism and their impact on women, particularly women of colour, whether free or imprisoned.⁵¹

poverty? According to Patrick Bond, aspirational targets like the MDGs are far less important than the actual social struggles underway across the world for basic needs and democracy. For further discussion, open http://www.choike.org/documentos/bond_mdgs_2005.pdf

⁵⁰ The reported pregnancy-related mortality rate has increased in some countries while decreasing in others. There is a big gap in maternal mortality rates between the developed and the developing countries in favour of the first. It is difficult to estimate maternal mortality, but important to know its extent in order to achieve improvement. In addition to estimating maternal deaths it is important to identify the risk factors that have adverse effects on pregnancy outcomes. For a more detailed discussion on Africa, open http://www.gfmer.ch/Endo/Course2003/Maternal_mortality.htm, and <http://www.un.org/ecosocdev/geninfo/afrec/bpaper/maineng.htm>; on the USA, open, http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_qn4188/is_20070825/ai_n19491054.

⁵¹ For information on treatment of prisoners in the USA, open, <http://www.sentencingproject.org/IssueAreaHome.aspx?IssueID=4#>

- B. *Welcomes* the opportunity the IWD annual thematic focus accords to its member churches to strengthen their own efforts to contribute to ending all forms of violence against women and children.
- C. *Affirms* the different processes towards the International Ecumenical Peace Convocation (IEPC) that are undertaken by member churches, especially those which aim at addressing gender-based violence.
- D. *Stands in solidarity* with indigenous women, women farmers and fisher-folk that are at the forefront of efforts to mitigate and adapt to the climate change crisis and to protect God's creation.
- E. *Calls* on member churches to invest in the building of stable families as a sure source of positive socialization for gender equity and peace for both boys and girls. Church-based initiatives, such as developing Christian family life education for mutuality and faithfulness, should include education in human sexuality.
- F. *Urges* member churches to use their theological and ethical resources as a basis for the rejection of all forms of violence against women and children as a sin, especially as they prepare for the IEPC.
- G. *Encourages* churches to develop and adopt policies on sexual harassment.
- H. *Welcomes* initiatives encouraging the involvement of men to embark on a journey of what it means to be "a man" within a world of gender justice and peace.
- I. *Calls* on member churches to appropriate such initiatives for the promotion of "positive masculinities" so as to address gender-based violence that is directly connected to certain social constructs of the male gender.
- J. *Encourages* Regional Ecumenical Organizations (REOs) to join hands with the WCC in its initiatives in building a movement for peace based on principles of gender justice; to advocate for women and men to become "movers for peace" through awareness-raising and gender training from both female and male perspectives; to establish a network of eminent women in church, government and society, who will work as midwives for just peace, linking activism for just peace and policy making, in preparation for the IEPC and beyond.
- K. *Invites* its churches and the international community to advocate for a radical transformation of the global economic architecture so as to place justice and sustainability at the centre of the economy. This approach would include valuing vital contributions of unpaid care (i.e., household and community) and women's unpaid labour.
- L. *Condemns* regulatory lenience, compounded by unjust economic systems, in the provision of affordable and adequate health care services so as to protect women's reproductive health against unnecessary maternal deaths.
- M. *Urges* churches to mobilize their governments to sign on to the United Nations Resolution 63/155⁵² (on the intensification of efforts to eliminate all forms of violence against women); and Resolution 63/156⁵³ (on trafficking in women and girls).

⁵² For full text of UN Resolution 63/155, open:
<http://daccessdds.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N08/480/09/PDF/N0848009.pdf?OpenElement>

- N. *Challenges* governments to ensure the participation of women – economists, ethicists and women involved in business entrepreneurship – in framing a new financial architecture that will be mutually beneficial to all, even to those on the margins of the world economy.
- O. *Invites* churches to celebrate this hundredth anniversary of the International Women’s Day, March 8, 2009, with prayers and proposals for plans of action towards the elimination of all forms of violence against women and children in church and society.

- **Joint written statement made at the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women fifty-third session entitled “Partners for Change: Faith-based responses to gender inequality, care giving and HIV”, New York, USA, March 2009**

Partners for Change: Faith-based responses to gender inequality, caregiving and HIV

- 1 The members of Ecumenical Women welcome the concerns of the 53rd session of the Commission on the Status of Women “The equal sharing of responsibilities between women and men, including caregiving in the context of HIV/AIDS.” The fact that nearly 90% of caregiving falls to women exposes that there is no equal sharing of responsibility between men and women anywhere in the world.⁵⁴ We congratulate the CSW for raising this theme that demands attention and policy response. As millions of people die, women are at the bedsides of the sick. This act of mercy takes women away from their livelihoods and providing for their children, creating a tragic cycle of poverty and vulnerability.
- 2 We write this statement presenting ourselves as partners in the solution to creating a more equitable society between women and men that is free from AIDS. Grounded in communities around the world, faith-based organizations are uniquely poised to respond to HIV and AIDS at all levels. As organizations that were the founders and are the practitioners of health care systems, we have the responsibility to share accurate information and train caregivers. While we continue to provide care, it is foremost the government’s responsibility to provide health care for its people. We acknowledge that in many cases churches have contributed to the spread of stigma and misinformation about HIV and AIDS, undermining prevention efforts and inflicting additional suffering.
- 3 The pandemic demands bold and creative approaches, which must recognize the reality of power and gender roles which have contributed to the disempowerment

⁵³ For full text of UN Resolution 63/156, open <http://daccessdds.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N08/480/15/PDF/N0848015.pdf?OpenElement>

⁵⁴ Women & HIV/AIDS, Confronting the Crisis. UNFPA 2008.

of women. Gender equality must be realized to stop the victimization of women. We recognize that as religious organizations we have a role in creating the cultures that work to redefine gender roles and responsibilities.

- 4 We raise up and affirm the commitments of the Beijing Platform for Action, the Declaration of Commitment of the 2001 United Nations General Assembly Special Session on HIV/AIDS, and the 2006 Political Declaration on HIV/AIDS. We continue to call for governments to implement the commitments made in these declarations.
- 5 The gravity of the pandemic has helped expose systemic issues that foster injustice and multiply the loss of life, including: stigma, gender inequality, poverty, unemployment, unjust trade policies, racism, violence and conflict. Tackling these issues alone will not solve the crisis. We must adopt intersectoral approaches which ensure the protection of human rights, reproductive rights, legal rights, women's empowerment and economic justice. A gender sensitive response to AIDS must invest in changing social, cultural and economic factors that put women and girls at risk. Investing in women and girls includes allocating flexible and adequate funds to organizations that reach women and girls, providing them with appropriate services and ensuring they have equal opportunities.

Overcoming stigma for comprehensive response

- 6 We cannot adequately address HIV and AIDS without first overcoming the barriers of fear and shame. The effect of stigma on HIV-positive persons and their families cannot be overstated. Stigma can mean that family members care for the sick alone unable to seek help because of shame, or that people do not seek their diagnosis because they are afraid of being cast out of their community. Women and girls disproportionately experience the effects of stigma and discrimination, but everyone affected and infected by HIV must have their human rights protected.

We therefore recommend governments:

- Implement the commitments made at previous inter-governmental meetings, especially the Beijing Platform for Action, the Declaration of Commitment of the 2001 United Nations General Assembly Special Session on HIV/AIDS, and the 2006 Political Declaration on HIV/AIDS.
- Establish policy priorities that adequately provide access to care and for HIV-positive people.
- Ensure the involvement of HIV-positive people in every aspect of program planning, execution and evaluation.
- Ensure that national policies and responses include analysis of their impact on women and girls.
- Demonstrate solidarity with HIV-positive persons through public actions.
- Outlaw discrimination based on gender and HIV status.

Addressing systems of gender inequality

7 Women often have less status and access to education, health care, and economic security than men, which affects their ability to protect themselves from infection. Many cannot say "no" or negotiate the use of condoms because they fear they will be divorced or that their husband or other male partner will respond violently. The practice of child marriage renders girls more vulnerable to contracting HIV. Violence against women is a significant human rights violation and public health problem in every country in the world.

We therefore recommend governments:

- Emphasize and respond to the growing feminization of AIDS nationally, regionally and internationally.
- Promote gender equality (with both male and female perspectives) in leadership training that addresses power relations between the sexes.
- Create programs that create a culture of safety for women and girls, including in partnership with men and boys.
- Implement educational models that challenge domination and teach new patterns of male sexual responsibility and nurturing masculinities.
- Promote changes in the gendered division of domestic tasks and achieve a balance of caring responsibilities.
- Promote laws that punish the perpetrators of violence against women, especially rape, and ensure training of police, lawyers and policy makers in how to uphold these laws.
- Empower women to participate, thus realizing their human rights to become themselves agents for change.

Caregiving at home and in the community

8 Millions of women care for their family and community members as they suffer; in Africa, a silent army of female volunteers cares for the sick. Some are trained as community health workers or birth attendants, while others are simply responding to immediate needs. Where hospitals are not available, faith-based organizations frequently fill in the gaps, providing everything from food, to support groups and last rites. Most caregivers receive little or no financial support, even for necessary medical supplies or transportation expenses. This burden frequently results in an inability to pay for family expenses, such as food or school fees, causing girls to withdraw from school to provide care and/or lost family income, increasing their risk of sexual exploitation and HIV.

We therefore recommend governments:

- Recognize the magnitude and the implications of unpaid care work carried out by women.
- Encourage the creation of innovative local and national responses to remunerate caregivers.
- Include providing food as part of local response strategies.
- Increase resources for care programs in the home and at the local level.

- Study the burden of care on young people and provide specific support for young caregivers.
- Ensure free primary and secondary education for girls and boys.

Strengthening healthcare systems

9. Many women who were first at the bedside of HIV-positive persons are occupying those beds today. When women are ill, men do not always take on the same responsibilities. In communities heavily affected by HIV, services are stretched more than ever. Women are often the last to receive healthcare, and HIV-positive women often face more discrimination when trying to obtain treatment, particularly reproductive health services. Five out of six people who need anti-retroviral treatment do not receive it.⁵⁵ Access to medicine is prevented by high costs, inadequate training of health professionals and unfair global trade rules hinder distribution. We urge governments to scale up access to antiretroviral medicines and overcome trade barriers, including distributing generic drugs. Profit motives should not override the urgent humanitarian need for readily available, safe and affordable drugs.

We therefore recommend governments:

- Promote closer partnerships with civil society, faith-based organizations, the United Nations, and organizations of HIV-positive people, to increase capacity for care and support.
- Ensure that safe, effective, affordable medicines are widely available to alleviate suffering and extend life.
- Promote integrated healthcare that includes treatment and access to anti-retroviral therapy, taking into account local demographics and the feminization of the pandemic.

Increasing resources for social protection

10. It is becoming clear that HIV is not only a health issue; it is one of the biggest threats to development and security in the world. The ramifications of HIV and AIDS are particularly grave for societies where the extended family serves as the system for social security for the elderly, those who are ill and orphans. AIDS compounds the strain on public institutions and resources, while undermining traditional safety nets like the family. In nations with high HIV prevalence, there is a strong correlation with decreased development capacity because the workforce has been decimated. Further weakened by the burden of national debt, these nations need urgent access to affordable treatment. In some cases, structural adjustment policies have systematically decreased spending on social sectors, while military spending has continued to rise. As a result, women and children experience diminished access to basic health and education services.

We therefore recommend governments:

- Continue efforts for relief of the illegitimate debt of highly indebted countries to make sure that a significant proportion of the released funds are used for

⁵⁵ "Report on 3 x 5 Initiative." UNAIDS & WHO 2005.

- strengthening health systems and HIV and AIDS response.
- Monitor national resource allocations and distribution to ensure that they benefit HIV and AIDS interventions, including community monitoring systems to avoid corruption.
- Protect budget allocations to critical social sectors including institutionalizing gender responsive budgeting.
- Undertake national analysis of women's contributions in caregiving and its role in the economy.
- Review resource allocations for gender equality targets in poverty reduction strategies.

Prevention

11. If there is one thing that AIDS has taught us, it is that we cannot treat ourselves out of this pandemic, people and governments everywhere must stop the spread of HIV. Our organizations have learned that prevention methods are effective when there is openness and dialogue. We call for increased investment in prevention strategies, especially those where women control the means to protect themselves.

We therefore recommend governments:

- Acknowledge and promote the responsibility and involvement of both men and women in prevention efforts.
- Fund and resource community-based programs delivering and promoting education, prevention, counselling and testing, and life skills to men and women.
- Fund and promote economic self-sufficiency programs.
- Increase investments in the research and development of microbicides and the female condom.
- Affirm the right of men and women, especially young people, to have access to comprehensive sexual reproductive health education and services to prevent unwanted pregnancies, and make informed and educated choices about their sexual health and prevent the spread of HIV.

12. In conclusion, we affirm our belief that both women and men are created in God's image (Genesis 1:27). It is not enough to recognize that the face of AIDS is becoming younger, poorer and more female. We must meet the need where it exists, both at the bedside of the person who is ill, and the woman at his side. Together as partners we can create a world where all may have life, and have it abundantly.

- **Joint oral statement at the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women fifty-third session with recommendations for global governance, structures and frameworks, New York, USA, 5 March 2009**

It is my honour to speak on behalf of the organizations of Ecumenical Women at the United Nations; we are an international coalition of faith-based organizations working for gender equality. Today, churches and faith-based communities are deeply concerned about the financial crisis further exacerbating gender inequalities and denying women's financial empowerment.

The financial crisis has led to the decline in export and government revenues, domestic and foreign investments, migrant remittances, and official development assistance; overall, this has negatively impacted women's advancement.

In the developing world, women make up the bulk of the workforce in export-oriented industries that take advantage of cheap labour. This makes women especially vulnerable to unemployment as global demand for goods and services contract. Women already work in unremunerated capacities in areas like care-giving, and we are deeply troubled that with pay cuts and the rise of lower paying jobs, existing meager remunerations may be further decreased. Even in the financial crisis, churches affirm how unpaid care-giving contributes to the economy and we urge that it be measured and remunerated.

Women also comprise of a growing number of migrant workers. In the wake of the economic recessions affecting their host countries, migrant remittances that augment household incomes of many families in low-income countries are expected to decline. This could have dire consequences for children's food, education, shelter and access to healthcare.

Unfortunately, there is little that financially protects women during economic uncertainties. As part of structural adjustment programmes imposed by the Bretton Woods institutions in the 1990s, social safety nets have been gradually dismantled. As a result, many women and their communities now have little access to basic social services that could have ameliorated the adverse socio-economic impacts of the crisis.

For Ecumenical Women, genuine development is one that fosters just, equitable and caring relationships. Equality between women and men of all races and classes is a matter of human rights and a condition for social justice; it is a fundamental prerequisite for development and peace. Due in large part to the efforts of pioneering UN conferences on women, there is now growing acknowledgement that development cannot be attained without gender equality.

We affirm that women are also part of the solution to the global financial crisis. It is critical, therefore, that women are intentionally, strategically and systematically involved in the discussions and decision-making processes around the global financial crisis.

To this end, Ecumenical Women offer the following recommendations:

- Democratize global economic governance structures, including through women's representation and participation;
- Strengthen global regulatory frameworks to protect women in the workforce and by ensuring the international institutions', governments' and corporations' adherence to human rights, labour standards and environmental agreements; and

- Implement the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families;
- Ensure that care work is recognized and remunerated, incorporate women's contribution in care-giving and its role in the economy, and assess the value of unremunerated work and reflect it in its official accounts; and
- Strengthen the gender equality architecture at the UN and other international financial and trade institutions.

Thank you.

• **Joint oral statement made at the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women fifty-third session on the subject of the HIV pandemic, gender roles and the global response, New York, USA, 9 March 2009**

Excellencies and colleagues,

It is my honour to speak on behalf of the organizations of Ecumenical Women at the United Nations; we are an international coalition of Christian organizations working for gender equality.

Ecumenical Women welcomes the discussions on the CSW priority theme. The gravity of the HIV pandemic has exposed systemic issues that foster injustice and multiply the loss of life, including: stigma and discrimination, gender inequality, poverty, unemployment, unjust trade policies, racism, violence and conflict. A silent army of unremunerated caregivers provide care; 90% of this burden disproportionately falls on women and must be recognized. This act of mercy takes women away from their livelihoods, creating a tragic cycle of poverty and vulnerability.

The global response to the HIV pandemic demands bold and creative approaches which recognize how gender inequality contributes to the disempowerment of women. We recognize that as faith-based organizations we have the capacity to help redefine gender roles and responsibilities. Further, we emphasize that a gender sensitive response to HIV must improve policies and programmes which allocate flexible and adequate funds and facilities that reach women and girls. Multi-sectoral approaches as well as necessary national and international legal mechanisms to ensure the protection of women's human rights, including sexual and reproductive rights, must be adopted.

We promote universal access to prevention, treatment, care and support in the context of HIV and AIDS including to anti-retroviral therapy along with the full range of comprehensive sexual and reproductive health services, taking into account the feminization of the pandemic. Institutionalizing gender responsive budgeting is essential; therefore, we encourage budget allocations to critical social sectors, including health and

education, and the creation of innovative national responses which fairly remunerate caregivers. Moreover, we urge governments to scale up access to antiretroviral therapy and overcome trade barriers, including distributing generic drugs. Profit motives should not override the urgent humanitarian need for readily available, safe and affordable drugs.

We reaffirm the Beijing Platform for Action, the 2001 Declaration of Commitment on HIV/AIDS, and the 2006 Political Declaration on HIV/AIDS. We continue to call for governments to implement the commitments made in these declarations.

In conclusion, as women and men of faith, we are committed to the creation of a more equitable society between women and men that is also free from AIDS. Grounded in our faith and commitment to global justice, we believe that the church – at its best – can be a transformative centre which models gender equality, resists systems of oppression, supports and promotes women’s rights. We reaffirm our belief that both women and men are created in God’s image. We recognize that the face of AIDS is becoming younger, poorer and more female, and we all must partner to meet the needs of these women where it exists.

Thank you.

- **Workshop entitled “United to End Violence Against Women” held to reflect on the recent International Women’s Day, Geneva, Switzerland, 12 March 2009**

Christian women and men speak out against gender-based violence

"Women and Men united to end violence against women and girls" was the vision discussed during a lunch-time lecture at the Ecumenical Centre in Geneva, Switzerland on 12 March.

“Sexual and physical violence against women and children is genuinely epidemic. It knows no bounds,” said Sarah Davies, World YWCA communications assistant at a tray lunch titled, ‘Unite to End Violence against Women’ on March 12 at the Ecumenical Centre in Geneva, Switzerland.

Organized by the World Council of Churches, World Alliance of Reformed Churches, Lutheran World Federation, Ecumenical Women’s Group in Geneva and the World YWCA, the tray lunch was an opportunity to reflect on the recent International Women’s Day. Speakers included Professor Vera Baboun of the University of Bethlehem and Marlon Zakeyo of the World Student Christian Federation.

Davies reminded those present that young people, especially young women, must be at the heart of all efforts to eliminate violence against women. “How can we change age old

attitudes and behaviors that have fuelled the acceptance of violence against women without young people being central to that change? We can't."

"Ensure young people are in leadership positions and have a place at as many decision making tables as possible. Make space in your organizations, your churches, your homes for young people to share their ideas and thoughts on eliminating violence against women," stressed Davies. "Young women are a huge untapped resource. They bring energy, ideas and a whole new perspective that can enrich the decision-making of any organization. Youth engagement leads to youth development and youth development contributes to the health of vibrant and inclusive communities – and perhaps even a world free of all forms of violence."

Globally, 1 in every 3 women suffers from violence and Zayeko highlighted the important role men play in the fight to end violence against women. "Men often put sticks in their ears when it comes to women's organizations advocating for the elimination of violence against women," he reflected. "Too often, you hear the excuse that domestic violence is 'private business' or 'bedroom business' but it is now up to men in positions of power to champion the issues of violence against women. Men cannot leave it to women's organizations."

Zayeko also reflected on the lip service that is paid to women living in countries of conflict such as Zimbabwe and Palestine. "In situations of conflict, women's issues become marginalized. Women are told they need to wait while the 'big business' is being dealt with. "

Professor Baboun gave an impassioned plea to all-present to remember the struggle of the Palestinian woman. "Self-awareness and self-empowerment are the only twins that need to nurture themselves by themselves. Consequently, every Palestinian woman needs to give birth to such twins to live her life to its fullness."

Baboun explained that honor crimes and the levels of incest had increased with the construction of the 'Apartheid Wall' and challenged those living in the Western world to ensure young people are always taught the truth when reflecting on the Palestinian issue. "If you show young people the real story, the right story, then there will be peace for the women of Israel and peace for the Palestinian women."

Patriarchal oppression is a way of life for Palestinian women and Baboun believes young people have a non-negotiable role to play in the future. "If we don't start empowering young Palestinian people to fight the wall, the war, the oppression, the discrimination then who knows what will happen? They must be empowered to besiege the wall, or the wall will besiege them."

When the floor was opened for all to discuss the issue of violence against women, many had questions and reflections on the role of the church and the role of decision makers. "The long struggle of women will continue unless we all take individual responsibility to continuously challenge the church, friends, family, work places and communities on the

important issues facing women, “ concluded Davies. “ It will take a collective force to end violence against women, but the change has to start with our own attitudes and behaviour.”

- **Letter from WCC general secretary to WCC member churches, CWCs, REOs, specialized ministries and IEOs encouraging them to keep gender issues on the agenda and in the life of the church, 26 March 2009**

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

Greetings in the name of the Triune God, our model of unity based on love.

Every year on March 8, the churches join the international community to celebrate International Women’s Day (IWD). This is a day that has been set aside to remind us of the role of women in church and society. Since a hundred years ago when women started the process of raising awareness in their communities on issues of gender justice in work and economy, each year has also been a time for communities’ to take stock on the place ‘ascribed’ to women.

This year under the theme of “men and women unite to end violence against women,” a statement was brought to the executive committee with clear recommendations regarding what is happening as well as what still needs to happen to address violence against women in church and society. Here are the recommendations that were approved by the above mentioned executive committee meeting that we have been asked to share with the fellowship of member churches.

The WCC executive committee:

Invites its member churches to be outspoken against the continuing manifestations of violence against women and children.

Calls on member churches to invest in the building of stable families as a sure source of positive socialization for gender equity and peace for both boys and girls. Church-based initiatives, such as developing Christian family life education for mutuality and faithfulness, should include education in human sexuality.

Urges member churches to use their theological and ethical resources as a basis for the rejection of all forms of violence against women and children as a sin, especially as they prepare for the IEPC.

Encourages churches to develop and adopt policies on sexual harassment.

Welcomes initiatives encouraging the involvement of men to embark on a journey of what it means to be “a man” within a world of gender justice and peace.

Calls on member churches to appropriate such initiatives for the promotion of “positive masculinities” so as to address gender-based violence that is directly connected to certain social constructs of the male gender.

Invites its churches and the international community to advocate for a radical transformation of the global economic architecture so as to place justice and sustainability at the centre of the economy. This approach would include valuing vital contributions of unpaid care (i.e. household and community) and women’s unpaid labour.

Urges churches to mobilize their governments to sign on to the United Nations Resolution 63/15556 (on the intensification of efforts to eliminate all forms of violence against women); and Resolution 63/15657 (on trafficking in women and girls).

Invites churches to celebrate this hundredth anniversary of the International Women’s Day, March 8, 2009, with prayers and proposals for plans of action towards the elimination of all forms of violence against women and children in church and society.

We realize that many members are already deeply engaged in the issues raised above. We want to encourage the whole fellowship of member churches to keep these issues on their agenda. This should not be confined only to the context of the International Women’s Day each year, but also in the life of the church, so that every day we will seek to promote gender justice for a genuine culture of peace.

May the God who has called us to act in justice, love mercy and walk humbly before God, give us the grace to be true to this call.

Yours in God’s service,
Rev. Dr Samuel Kobia
General secretary

⁵⁶ For full text of UN Resolution 63/155, open:
<http://daccessdds.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N08/480/09/PDF/N0848009.pdf?OpenElement>

⁵⁷ For full text of UN Resolution 63/156, open
<http://daccessdds.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N08/480/15/PDF/N0848015.pdf?OpenElement>

REGIONAL CONCERNS

AFRICA

African Union

- **Letter from WCC general secretary to H.E. Dr Jean Ping, chairperson of the African Union Commission on the occasion of his election to that office, 18 March 2009**

Your Excellency,

It is my distinct pleasure to send you a letter of congratulations on the occasion of your election to become the head the African Union. You are assuming the leadership of this august organization at a very difficult yet opportune time in the history of Africa. Having observed your achievements in the past I must add that the AU leadership has chosen the right person for the right time. My confidence is that you are more than equal to the task!

The World Council of Churches continues to be a firm supporter of the African Union because we believe that the AU is the appropriate political authority to speak on behalf of Africa at the continental and global level.

Your Excellency, we appreciate the dynamic leadership you continue to demonstrate particularly in conflict situations like Darfur, Somalia, Democratic Republic of Congo and Zimbabwe. Your actions attest to your wisdom, experience and commitment. These are qualities that I as an African value greatly. Therefore I wish to assure you of my full support for your pursuit of the vision and mission of the AU.

It is in this context that I want to share with you the recent statement issued by the World Council of Churches executive committee on the Democratic Republic of Congo. My office is prepared to collaborate with you in the search for lasting peace based on justice not only in the DRC but also in other conflict areas. It is also because of the importance we attach to our collaboration with the African Union that the World Council of Churches and the All Africa Conference of Churches appointed Mr Melaku Kifle as Ecumenical Envoy to the African Union.

I look forward to meeting with you at the next opportunity. I will take the occasion when next in Addis Ababa to visit you and express my support for your work personally as well as on behalf of the ecumenical movement.

Sincerely yours
Rev. Dr Samuel Kobia
General secretary

Angola and Mozambique

- **Synthesis of report on “Living letters” ecumenical team visit to Angola and Mozambique, 18-28 July 2009**

Mozambique has a lot in common with Angola. They are both former Portuguese colonies. Both had their independence in 1975. The official language in Mozambique is Portuguese, same as Angola. Mozambique is divided into ten provinces and 129 districts while Angola is divided into eighteen provinces and 163 municipalities. Angola was one of the countries that Pope Benedict the XVI visited in his first trip to Africa, since becoming pope in 2005. The visit took place in March this year (2009)

Speaking about Africa’s bad reputation of conflicts, civil wars, poverty, corruption and diseases, he said the continent had too often seen “the destructive power of civil strife, the descent into a maelstrom of hatred and revenge, the squandering of the efforts of generations of good people.” In relation and more specific to Angola, he said “Tragically, the clouds of evil have also overshadowed Africa, including this beloved nation of Angola...” He called Africa, -“this great continent so filled with hope, yet so thirsty for justice, for peace ...” <http://www.nation.co.ke/News/africa/-/1066/549516/-/13qiuw0z/-/index.html>.

A Living Letters team visited Angola and Mozambique in July 2009. As mentioned earlier, the two countries have many similarities. The similarities extend to issues, challenges and problems facing them. The problems facing Angola as described by Pope may not substantially vary from those Mozambique encounters. Living letters observed that in Angola, despite the war ending about 7 years ago, its effects are still eminent. Josefina Sandemba, a pastor from the Evangelical Congregational Church in Angola (IECA) while briefing the team told them that; “in Angola, we do not have an open conflict right now ... but guns keep taking their toll within communities still today”. She added that; "Almost every family has been affected one way or another by the long decades of war.”

Senbemba who is responsible for the women's work at the Council of Christian Churches in Angola (CICA) told the team that; in this context, women pay the highest price. "They live with former combatants, now demobilized, or with relatives who have suffered amputations or other injuries, and in many cases they live under the poverty line".

In Luanda, the country's capital, "women typically leave home at 3 a.m. to look for saleable goods, and often walk through the whole city, sometimes pregnant or carrying little children", she explained. "When they reach home, at about 10 p.m., they might have earned 200 kwanzas (less than 3 US dollars), but if sales were not good, there may not be anything for dinner."

The team also learned that domestic violence has been on the rise. Paulo de Almeida, the national police chief reported that "rapes are taking place daily." Rev. Rui García Filho, general secretary of the Evangelical Baptist Church in Angola told the team that; "The causes of this increase are complex. The war has left a heritage of misery as well as an impact on the culture, and domestic violence is one of its outcomes."

According to one of the beneficiaries of a women literacy programme supported by the Young Women's Christian Association, education is an essential tool of empowering women. It can help to overcome violence against women. Mariana Afonso, a 24-year-old and a mother of five told the Living Letters team the difference that being able to read has made in her life. According to her; "A husband shows a different kind of respect if you are able to read." "And you do not have to take it anymore from anyone who lies to you", added another young woman.

Democratic Republic of Congo

- **Meeting of an ecumenical delegation with the president of the Democratic Republic of Congo, Mr Joseph Kabila, 11 November 2008**

People are tired of war, church leaders will tell presidents of D.R. Congo and Rwanda

A delegation of church leaders from Burundi, Rwanda and the Democratic Republic of Congo has set out to meet the presidents of the latter two countries in order to convey them a strong message in favor of peace.

The 5-strong ecumenical delegation is gathering today at the Congolese capital Kinshasa, where they expect to meet with President Joseph Kabila before traveling in the coming weeks to the capital city of Kigali in order to meet the Rwandan President Paul Kagame.

"The aim is to transmit them a message of peace," says Rev. Dr André Karamaga, the World Council of Churches (WCC) programme executive for Africa and general secretary-elect of the All Africa Conference of Churches (AACC).

The initiative was taken at a meeting of church leaders from the Great Lakes region convened by the AACC in Nairobi, Kenya on 22-23 October. On that occasion, some 12 church leaders from Burundi, Rwanda and D.R. Congo decided that the heads of state and the rebel leader should hear a clear message: "People are tired and want an end to the war," and "dialogue costs much less than armed confrontation".

Some 250,000 people have fled their homes in the eastern part of the D.R. Congo escaping the fight that broke out between the army and rebels in August. Rebels are led by renegade General Laurent Nkunda, who says they fight to protect the Congolese Tutsi community from being attacked by Rwandan Hutu fighters, who fled to D.R. Congo,

some of them perpetrators of the 1994 Rwandan genocide. The Congolese government seems to have failed to deliver on its promise to stop the Hutu forces from using its territory.

The D.R. Congo, a country the size of Western Europe and located in the heart of Africa, is striving to recover from a long civil war that reportedly killed some three million people, mostly through starvation and disease. As the newly internally displaced people join about one million already displaced in the region, fears of a humanitarian disaster are on the rise.

The group of church leaders is led by the Anglican Archbishop of Burundi Bernard Ntahoturi, Ntahoturi chairs the Council of Churches of Burundi and the Great Lakes Ecumenical Forum and is a member of the WCC central committee. Also a member of the group is the Anglican Bishop of Rwanda Onesphore Rwaje, who is the president of the Protestant Council of Rwanda. Mbari Kioni, AACC director of Advocacy, Research and Communication is accompanying the team.

The Congolese members of the delegation are: Bishop Dieudonné Mbaya Tshiakany, moderator of the National Synod of the Church of Christ in Congo and president of the Fellowship of Christian Councils and Churches of Great Lakes and Horn of Africa (FECCLAHA); Bishop Jean-Luc Kuye-Ndondo wa Mulemera, president of the Church of Christ in Congo in South Kivu and a member of the senate; and Rev. Dr Kakule Molo, president of the Baptist Community in Central Africa, based in eastern Congo, and a member of parliament.

Churches in D.R. Congo are working to alleviate the humanitarian crisis. While many aid groups work to assist those in camps for displaced people, local members of Action by Churches Together (ACT) International are striving to help the largely "invisible" displaced families – those who are not in camps but sheltered in family homes – and the increasingly vulnerable communities who are hosting them. Initial plans for assistance include support for an estimated 60,000 people, as well as access to water and sanitation for significantly more families.

Churches can't be silent on D.R. Congo humanitarian catastrophe

"It is impossible to preach God's love in Jesus Christ while being silent about the effects of such a grave humanitarian catastrophe," a group of church leaders told D.R. Congo president Joseph Kabila in Kinshasa yesterday.

Sponsored by the All Africa Conference of Churches (AACC) and facilitated by the World Council of Churches (WCC), the 5-person ecumenical delegation was headed by the Anglican Archbishop of Burundi Bernard Ntahoturi, a WCC central committee member and the chair of the Council of Churches of Burundi and of the Great Lakes Ecumenical Forum.

Some 250,000 people have fled their homes in the eastern part of the D.R. Congo escaping the latest outbreak of violence between the army and rebels in August. As the

newly internally displaced people join about one million already displaced in the region, fears of a humanitarian disaster are on the rise.

The ecumenical delegation congratulated President Kabila for "having chosen and privileged the path of dialogue in order to achieve peace". The group plans to meet Rwandan President Paul Kagame in the coming days or weeks, as well as "other actors able to contribute to the resolution of the current crisis," which includes the Congolese rebels leader Laurent Nkunda.

Reaffirming the commitment of the churches in Burundi, Rwanda and D.R. Congo "to work together for peace, healing and reconciliation in the region," the group made an "urgent appeal to the concerned governments and the international community to protect civilians, children, women, and the elderly by applying the agreements already achieved".

- **Statement on the situation In the Democratic Republic of Congo, WCC executive committee, 17–20 February 2009**

Background

The Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), the third-largest country in Africa, is the embodiment of human pain. The DRC war has taken a terrible toll: some 4.3 million people have died in the last five years, and over 14 million Congolese are malnourished because of the protracted conflict. Aid workers have suffered attacks that have forced them to suspend activities in parts of Congo, leaving many displaced persons without assistance – the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) estimates that perhaps 70,000 people from the latest wave of displacement may not be receiving international assistance.

An estimated 40 per cent of deaths are of women and children. It is probable that upwards of 1,000 women are brutally raped each month. There is deliberate physical mutilation of their reproductive organs, sometimes with the use of guns, as a way of purposely annihilating and exterminating any future population. The women are often left emotionally scared, as well as with untreated fistula resulting in incontinence. There is almost no medical care for them. They are isolated from others.

Reports from the field talk of widespread looting, attacks on civilians and forced conscription into armed groups. The tortured DRC continues to generate blood fortunes that swell the coffers of some architects of globalization and a consortium of international criminals who supply arms in exchange for minerals. DRC's tropical forest, the largest in Africa, provides safe haven for rebels from neighbouring countries. These countries have felt justified in crossing into the DRC in pursuit of the rebels, to safeguard their own national security.

The minerals of the DRC include large deposits of diamonds. The radium of the DRC represents 60 per cent of the resources used in the West. Apart from Russia and Canada,

the only other worthwhile global source of cobalt is DRC. Some 40 per cent of the global supply of colton, necessary for the manufacture of mobile telephones, comes from DRC. The confiscation of its mineral wealth has meant that the land of DRC, from the colonial era onward, has never truly belonged to the Congolese people. The nation has never been able to extricate itself from the grasp of its brutal history. The Belgian colonial rule perpetuated the deliberate plunder of natural resources.

In its political history, King Leopold II of Belgium ran Congo as a private estate and oversaw the estimated deaths of millions and the mutilated of others as part of a pattern of coercive tactics to gain cheap labour. Patrice Lumumba, the first Congolese Prime Minister, was assassinated on January 17, 1961, reportedly with the collusion of Belgium, the USA and other western powers. Mobutu Sese Seko's dictatorship was marked by untold human rights violations. Under Mobutu, the Congolese endured misrule for 30 years. He survived in power with the help of the United States who provided him with more than \$300 million in weapons and \$100 million in military training. Laurent Kabila overthrew Mobutu in 1997, following the end of the Cold War. He was assassinated in January 2001. Joseph Kabila was then installed as president, taking over from his late father Laurent Kabila at the same time that ethnic militarism was transforming the eastern region of the DRC into a patchwork of warlords' fiefdoms. One of the notable forces supporting Kabila is the Mayi Mayi militia movement, a loose association of traditional Congolese "defense" forces.

The church/state relationship in the DRC has a chequered history. At times the church has been very close to the state; at other times the church has kept a sacred distance between politicians and hierarchy. There also have been historical moments when sections of the church have been the fiercest critics of the state. Upwards of 80% of the DRC population of 65 million is Christian; therefore, the state cannot entirely ignore the voice of the church. This is especially true because the church provides more humanitarian resources to the people (health, education, food) than the state ever did, whether during the colonial or post-colonial periods. Yet the church's prophetic role has not been as effective as it should have been, for the church has failed to speak with a unified voice on the socio-political conditions in the country.

In recent years, the church has given insightful leadership in the national debate on the future of DRC. The churches and local and international ecumenical organizations have also stepped up their solidarity and involvement. ACT International as well as a number of specialized ministries from Europe and North America has increased the humanitarian and diaconal work.

With the joint goals of pastoral care and listening to the churches in the DRC, a group of church leaders visited the country earlier this year, led by Archbishop Bernard Ntahoturi, Anglican archbishop of Burundi. Ntahoturi chairs the Council of Churches of Burundi and the Great Lakes Ecumenical Forum and is a member of WCC central committee.

Churches in Congo are working to alleviate the humanitarian crisis, promote a peaceful resolution to the conflict and advocate for an end to the violations of human rights. While

many aid groups work to assist those in camps for displaced people, local members of Action by Churches Together (ACT) International are targeting for help the largely 'invisible' displaced families – those who are not in camps but sheltered in families' houses – and the increasingly vulnerable communities who are hosting them. Initial plans for assistance include support for an estimated 60,000 people, as well as water and sanitation support for significantly more families.

As of December 2008, it is estimated that nearly 250,000 people have fled their homes in the eastern part of the DRC escaping the fight that broke out between the army and rebels in August. These people have joined the 1,000,000 who fled in previous rebellions. The rebels say that they fight to protect the Congolese Tutsi community from being attacked by Rwandan Hutu rebels, who fled to DRC. Some of them fled after having perpetrated the 1994 Rwandan genocide. For a long time, the Congolese government seemed to have failed to stop the Hutu forces from using its territory. The situation would change due to the new development which has two important aspects: peace talks under the chair of the UN secretary general's special envoy, General Olusegun Obasango, the former president of Nigeria. The second round of talks took place in Nairobi, Kenya in January 2009. The second aspect is the combined forces of the DRC and Rwandan armies whose main objective is to disarm the Rwandese rebels in the DRC.

The WCC executive committee, meeting at Bossey, Switzerland, 17-20 February 2009:

Welcomes the Goma and Nairobi meetings which revived the peace talks that served toward seeking unity of common purpose with neighbouring countries in order to enhance human security in the Great Lakes region and commends the political leaders committed to these processes.

Applauds the Congolese churches for their steadfast pursuit of dialogue and for taking a frontline role in leading the civil society in the process of inter-Congolese dialogue, accompanied by the All Africa Conference of Churches (AACC) and FECCLAHA (Fellowship of Councils and Churches in Great Lakes and the Horn of Africa).

Encourages the one ecumenical family to accompany and support the Congolese churches as they engage in the daunting task of advocacy for rehabilitation of the state, with particular attention to its functions and authority, good governance and national sovereignty, as well as to the healing and reconciliation of the whole people. Dialogue and healing among communities must include the war-torn eastern region.

Condemns the atrocities and wanton destruction of property, committed particularly in the mineral-rich eastern Congo, as well as condemning the plunder of Congo's natural resources which has contributed to turmoil in the country.

Challenges the international community to step up humanitarian support and technical support for national reconstruction, helping to stimulate and guide socio-economic restitution for the people of the DRC who have been cheated of their wealth through

systematic international plunder of natural resources which should be destined for the well-being of the Congolese people.

Urges international support for the Congolese churches, the people of the DRC and the civil society as they pursue sustainable peace and national reconciliation through promulgation and reinforcement of laws to with those goals.

Calls on the African Union and the United Nations to be actively involved and to monitor peace initiatives in DRC, and to support the people of Congo in pursuing present and future opportunities for peace and reconciliation.

Urges the United Nations Security Council to strengthen and reinforce the embargo against illegal arms trafficking as well as monitoring illegal arms transfers, especially in the eastern Congo, by increasing the monitoring and pressure on international community to comply with the measures outlined in Security Council Resolution 1807.

Calls on UN agencies and bodies implementing UN Security Council Resolutions 1325 and 1820 concerning women and peace and ending sexual violence to provide resources, programming and technical expertise to end impunity for those responsible for sexual violence in the DRC and to increase resources and capacity of UN resources to accompany and provide health and healing services to victims of sexual violence and ensure that initiatives to end sexual violence are integrated in all peacekeeping and peace-building initiatives in the DRC.

Calls on the United Nations to continue with peacekeeping efforts by revising the mandate of the United Nations Mission in the Democratic Republic of Congo (MONUC) to include more practical and concerted efforts especially in eastern Congo while at the same time expanding peacekeeping presence to other conflict areas and to implement an institutionalized approach to disarmament and demobilization throughout the country.

Mourns the death of Dr Alison Des Forges, who died tragically in the 12 February 2009 airplane crash which was attempting a landing at the Buffalo, New York airport. She was one of the leading experts on the human rights violations in the DRC, Rwanda and Burundi. Through her research and twenty years of work at Human Rights Watch, she testified eleven times at the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda. Her work is credited with bringing credibility to the charge of genocide in the region.

Prays for Dr Des Forges, her family and friends and especially for the untold millions who have suffered and continue to suffer the ravages of this despicable time in our history.

- **Letter to Mr Ban Ki-moon, UN secretary general, on the situation in the Democratic Republic of Congo, 18 March 2009**

Your Excellency,
Dear Mr Secretary General,

The World Council of Churches (WCC) has been following with interest the priority attention you have been giving to Africa since your appointment as Secretary General of the United Nations. You have visited Africa and the Democratic Republic of Congo twice within a short period of time. As the general secretary of the WCC and as an African, I would like to convey to you the gratitude of the ecumenical movement for this and many other positive actions you are taking to help find solutions to the prevailing crises in Africa.

It is in appreciation of your leadership on Africa and your strong support for Africa – in particular concerning the crisis in Central Africa – which I would like to call your attention to a recent statement issued by the WCC executive committee to address the situation in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). A copy is attached. The statement reviews painful political developments, the tragic colonial history of DRC, and the exploitation of the rich natural resources with which DRC is endowed. The Congolese people have suffered much at the hands of those who have turned their God-given blessings into a curse!

The World Council of Churches believes that the current tragedy can be turned around, however, with determination and political will. Doing so will require that the international community works hand-in-hand with the leadership of DRC and of neighboring countries.

Mr Secretary General, within the short period of time since your assumption of office, you have demonstrated that you are determined to bring lasting peace with justice to the Democratic Republic of Congo and its suffering people. Hopes for durable solutions in the DRC have been rekindled by the concerted efforts of your office as well as the African Union, international NGOs and the government of the Democratic Republic of Congo. This holistic and coherent approach augurs very well for peace and security particularly in the Eastern Congo where atrocities have cost so many lives and left so many people deeply traumatized.

We welcome the constructive role of MONUC, the decisive and critical involvement of the African Union, and the positive and commendable involvement of your envoy General Olesgun Obasanjo. We also note the helpful and combined role of the governments of the neighboring countries. It is incumbent on the international community to give support and encouragement to these affirmative and constructive initiatives.

The international ecumenical community under the leadership of the WCC is fully determined to support the international peace initiatives being coordinated by your office. Our engagement in Africa takes place at the international, regional and national levels through the All Africa Conference of Churches (AACC), the Great Lakes Forum and our member churches in the DRC respectively.

Churches of the WCC are convinced that to attain a just peace it is imperative to have national and regional actors at the center of the peace process. This is particularly significant in the case of the Democratic Republic of Congo which shares boundaries with nine African countries. Its size and strategic location mean that peace in DRC will have positive implications for the region.

In order to capitalize on the current opportunity for peace, WCC appeals to you to ensure that:

- MONUC, which is operating under very difficult circumstances, has full and sustained international support for its role in protecting the lives of civilians, in particular women and children.
- The current global financial crisis does not in any way affect the humanitarian response and support for the people of the DRC.
- The illegal exploitation of the resources of the country is stopped and those involved brought to justice.
- The stabilization plan for eastern DRC and its implementation is given adequate attention and support so that the positive progress and results achieved so far are not lost.
- The UN Security Council provides sustained, high-level political engagement to promote a long-term political solution to the crisis.

We thank you again for your work and your attention to these concerns.

Sincerely yours,

Rev. Dr Samuel Kobia

General secretary

- **Excerpts from “Living letters” ecumenical team visit to the Democratic Republic of Congo, 8-14 July 2009**

Kobia urges churches to acknowledge existence of violence against women in Congo

In a speech in Kinshasa on 13 July, Rev. Dr Samuel Kobia, the general secretary of the World Council of Churches (WCC), challenged churches to end their denial of violence against women. "The churches still seem to relegate violence to the private sphere, and still understand violence as only physical," he said.

"The first and most obvious [effort] is to acknowledge that the violence actually exists," said Kobia at the opening of the All Africa Conference of Churches (AACC) women's workshop on Transformation Leadership for Peace, Healing and Reconciliation in Kinshasa, Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC).

"This means taking it out of the private arena and placing it squarely at the altars of our churches, in the seats of our parliament and in the halls of our academies," said Kobia.

Churches in the DRC report that as rebel groups continue their activities in the country, women and girls continue to suffer sexual violence by armed men. Some have been brutally gang-raped, often in front of their families and communities. In numerous cases, men have also been forced at gunpoint to rape their own their relatives.

"Those women are traumatized. We keep asking ourselves: what can we do to stop the violence," said Dr Christine Amisi, the coordinator of the HIV and AIDS programme of Panzi Hospital in Bukavu, South Kivu. The hospital specializes in handling cases of sexual violence. In 2008, for example, it has been handling 3500 case of sexual of violence.

"But those who have power seem to have a deaf ear," Amisi added.

Kobia's speech coincided with an ecumenical delegation visit sponsored by the WCC. The visit is part of the Living Letters series of visits where delegations visit churches in countries in conflict to listen, learn and show solidarity.

From 8-11 July, Kobia and the Living Letters delegation formed five groups which traveled to different parts of the DRC, before coming together in the city on 12 July. They visited communities and projects in Goma and Bukavu in the east, Bas-Congo in the west and the central Kasai province, as well as the area around Kinshasa.

"We have seen and heard stories of women and children who not only disproportionately bear the hardships and burden of poverty but sometimes with their bodies and life pay for the egos of violent men," said Kobia.

"While these stories ring loud and clear in our ears and their pain bleeds in our heart, we still find the myopia or perhaps complete blindness of the churches and communities to recognize and acknowledge this violence," he said.

Kobia said women were asking how many stories of pain they needed to tell before the church began to listen.

At the workshop leaders of the Church of Christ in Congo (ECC), said the Living Letters visit was crucial to them, since they knew the WCC had helped other countries, so it could help the DRC.

"We would like your assistance so that you can knock on the right door," Bishop Jean-Luc Kuye Ndongu, South Kivu's ECC president.

The ECC wants the WCC to help lobby the international community to put pressure on the leaders of the armed groups, who they say are based in western countries, to end the fighting. They are also asking those countries which purchase the minerals mined and sold by the rebels to stop.

People in DRC are yearning for peace, Living Letters team is told

From the smallest village to the biggest town in eastern Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) people are yearning for peace. Church leaders encourage the rebel fighters to disarm.

For several years, the people here have been caught in the midst of a complex conflict, widely seen to revolve around the extraction of mineral resources. Nearly 5 million people have been killed according to the Congolese church officials.

"We need peace. Our country has gone through hardships. We need your support," Rev. Muhasanya Lubunga, moderator of the Church of Christ in Congo (ECC), South Kivu told a Living Letters delegation from the World Council of Churches (WCC).

The delegation travelled to Bukavu in South Kivu and Goma in North Kivu provinces from 9 to 11 July. In their meeting with church leaders, government officials and community members, the delegation heard how the churches had promoted peace and reconciliation and mobilized relief, against rebels' terror.

"We know if different groups cannot live in peace with each other, the war will remain," said Rev. Kakule Molo, president of the Baptist Community in Central Africa, at a meeting in Goma.

The brutal force directed against civilians in the region by the rebels is one of the key concerns of the church leaders. Reports speak of killings and mass rapes, abductions and burned-down villages.

At the same time the church is taking steps to help rebels put down their weapons. Recently several hundred agreed to disarm.

Civilian hardship

On the day the Living Letters delegation visited Bukavu, Rozette Ndakumbusoga, a farmer from the Mwenga area, was uncertain she would be able to feed her two children. About two months ago, she fled to Bukavu after fighting broke out in Mwenga.

"We did not take anything. We took off as soon as we heard the guns. There were many of us," said Ndakumbusoga. "We have come to settle here with nothing."

"All we want is for the fighting to stop, so that we can return home to our farms," she said. "We also want to take our children back to school."

Like Ndakumbusoga, Mukobelwa Ndabegelwa, a school teacher, is among the 600,000 people from the region and many more from other parts of eastern DRC who have fled to safety in Bukavu. A few years ago, the city had a population of 200,000, but now the church officials say it has nearly 1.2 million.

"I pray the war ends so that we can go back to our families and our work. But we cannot because we fear the fighting," Ndabegelwa said.

Living in a crowded makeshift structure south of the town the teacher says their life was one of misery, a situation he blames on attacks by the so-called Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda (FDLR).

"Many of us are sick, our children are sick too. They need medicine, shelter and clothing," said Ndabegelwa. "We sleep on mats. We are many of us. It is very difficult for us."

Six years ago, the government signed a peace agreement with some rebel groups, but others did not sign. This resulted in relative peace. However, the church leaders observe that anytime the national army carries out military operations against the rebels, the rebels increase their attacks.

"People are flowing into the town of Bukavu to look for peace," said Bishop Jean-Luc Kuye Nondo, South Kivu's ECC president. "There are fewer people who produce food, so there is not enough to eat. When the operations are carried out, there is more suffering."

Persuading rebels to disarm

A widely held view among local leaders is that the FDLR, which traces its origin to the 1994 Rwanda genocide, is the main cause of misery in eastern DRC. They also agree that if the FDLR was peacefully talked to and disarmed, that would be a key step towards peace in the region.

With this belief, the church leaders have been reaching out to FDLR combatants and other local militias known as Mai Mai, urging them to disarm. Their efforts, according to Bishop Josué Bulambo Lembelembe, the ECC vice-president in South Kivu, have achieved major progress.

"We have prepared seven youth for this purpose. These activists go to churches and speak to people," said Bulambo. "They go to the rebels and speak to them about how their fighting is hurting the people. They urge them to leave the forest and go to live in peace with the people."

The process has succeeded in persuading some combatants to leave the forest, according to Bulambo. A few months ago, he said 293 of the rebel fighters disarmed in the presence of international community, church and civil society leaders.

"The only problem is that when an advance team [of rebels sent to Rwanda to explore whether they would be allowed to return there] went out, the national army and the Rwandan army started chasing after them," said Bulambo. "We were very disheartened."

In recent weeks, church leaders report a resurgence of attacks on civilians by the rebels. It follows the news that the national armies of the DRC and Rwanda would soon launch a military campaign against the FDLR.

In May 2009 the church leaders agreed with the FDLR that they disarm at least 1000 fighters, Ndondo explained.

"The fighters agreed. When we talked to their leaders, they said No!" said Kuye. "We urge you to talk to the leaders who live abroad." The FDLR leaders are said to be living in Germany and France.

"This is the biggest part of the problem. We are sure that without external factors, the Congolese people can agree with one another, said Molo. "For now one cannot say it is the only problem because there are problems within the communities. But this can be solved if there are no problems coming from outside".

Churches support victims of rape in the Democratic Republic of Congo

There is much hope in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) that the guns will soon fall silent. But the trail of human rights abuses the combatants leave behind compels the churches to intervene.

For the civilians it may not matter on which frontline they find themselves, says Dismas Kyanza, the Church of Christ in Congo (ECC) emergency officer for North Kivu, since all armed groups are committing atrocities.

"There are the local armed groups, international armies, national armed groups and foreign armies. The national army which is supposed to protect the civilians is also guilty," Kyanza told an international delegation that visited eastern DRC from 8 to 15 July on behalf of the World Council of Churches (WCC). The trip was part of the Living Letters series of visits through which small ecumenical teams visit churches in countries in conflict to listen, learn and show solidarity.

Those needing help are victims of torture, rape, abductions and displacement or even murder, the church officials in the DRC say. The churches have been helping them move beyond their traumatic situations, in some cases providing material, financial and medical support. They also offer some technical training in tailoring or weaving as means for long term support.

When rape as a "weapon of war" came into the picture, it prompted church protests and immediate responses.

"We saw the first case of a woman who had been raped and her organs mutilated in 1999. We had never seen anything like this before. Other cases started coming in soon after," explains Bishop Jean-Luc Kuye Ndong, the South Kivu president of the Church of Christ in Congo (ECC).

Within 10 years, there have been over 500,000 such cases, according to Dr Denis Mukwege, the founder of Panzi Hospital in Bukavu, which specializes in treating women and girls who have become victims of sexual violence.

The perpetrators of these crimes seek to cause as much physical and emotional harm as possible, explains Mukwege, judging by the injuries he has seen and the reports of how they were inflicted on the victims.

Violence affects not only eastern parts of the Democratic Republic of Congo

Any solution to the crisis in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) must engage the whole nation – not just the eastern region where violence is centred, a small ecumenical team visiting the Bas Congo and Kasai Oriental provinces has learned.

Karin Döhne, head of the Africa desk of the German Church Development Service (EED), and Dr Nigussu Legesse, WCC programme executive for Africa, visited the two provinces in July. They heard of the powerful sense of isolation and abandonment experienced by the people of the region, and learned of how the effects of the conflict in the east are felt in other parts of the country as well.

Legesse and Döhne were travelling as part of a larger Living Letters delegation, headed by WCC General Secretary Rev. Dr Samuel Kobia, which broke into five groups to visit different parts of the country 8-11 July, before coming together in the capital Kinshasa, 12-14 July. "Living Letters" are small international ecumenical teams travelling to locations around the world where Christians strive to overcome violence.

In the Bas Congo province, violence is increasingly a feature of daily life, fuelled by tension over an array of factors including high unemployment, weak economic conditions and changing population dynamics as refugees and displaced people move to the comparatively prosperous province. In the past refugees arrived from neighbouring Angola, nowadays the displaced come from the eastern part of the DRC.

Resented refugees

"Refugees are resented, even when they are Congolese," said Legesse. "The church has to work hard at changing people's minds and overcoming feelings of distrust, even hatred, of newcomers."

In the province of Kasai Oriental diamond mining has left a complex legacy. During the second war in the DRC, which started in 1998, the dominant diamond company MIBA –

jointly owned by the Congolese government and a Belgian investment company – poured both mining revenue and equipment into the government's war efforts. Now, with its capital and infrastructure depleted, MIBA has closed its production site near the provincial capital Mbuji-Mayi.

"Diamond mining was a major source of income for the local people," said Legesse. "It's a critical situation at the moment – there's no other real source of work." After years of urban growth, Mbuji-Mayi is now struggling as health centres close, school buildings fall into disrepair and many people struggle to afford basic necessities.

In the midst of this poverty and suffering, the Living Letters team observed diamond traders operating in the streets of Mbuji Mayi, dealing in diamonds worth tens of thousands of US dollars, produced from informal mining activities. "The soil of the province produces fortunes, but for the ordinary people or for public basic services not much is left said Döhne.

Sexual violence against women, especially young women, is on the rise in the DRC, the team was told – and HIV infections are consequently on the rise as well. In mining areas, very young girls offer themselves in return for money, food or shelter. It is not uncommon for men to have several partners and families, and most women have little economic security. Against this backdrop, churches have the challenging task of trying to promote responsible marital relations and parenting.

Churches respond to the crisis

In the context of this strife and hardship, the churches are providing a powerful witness. Churches are the biggest providers of health and education services in the DRC. In Bas Congo, more than 150,000 students study in church institutions. In Kasai Oriental, the Catholic Church runs over 3000 schools, and the Church of Christ in Congo (ECC) over 1400.

The Living Letters team visited the Institut Médical Evangélique, which runs a 400-bed hospital and trains doctors and nurses, and the Centre Evangélique pour la Coopération in Kimpese, which is in charge of hundreds of schools and a university.

Schools perform an important role beyond academic education: "They are seen as an important field where children can learn and practice peaceful co-existence," said Döhne. "They counterbalance the voices and actions of those who spread conflict and tension."

Under the umbrella of the ECC, a union of 62 Protestant denominations, the churches live out a practical ecumenism. "Member churches maintain their own identities, but for social services and projects they pool their resources and energies," said Legesse.

The *Centre Régional d'Appui et de Formation pour le Développement* in Kimpese, an activity of the ECC, mobilizes rural villages for community development and tackles the issues of deforestation and ecological damage.

In Kasai Oriental, where anti-personnel mines pose a severe danger and also hamper agricultural production, the ECC is working alongside an organization called Mines Advisory Group to raise awareness of the problem.

Even the seemingly everyday work of maintaining pastoral care in congregations is significant, said Döhne. For example, in spite of being impoverished, people in Mbujimayi still invest in new church buildings. "It is of the utmost importance to give people hope and encouragement," said Döhne.

But the people feel keenly their isolation.

"Again and again we heard the message from church leaders in this region that they feel ignored by the international community," said Legesse. "Because the war and violence has been most intense in the eastern part of the Congo, there is a tendency to place less emphasis on the suffering of the people in other parts of the country."

Members of the delegation called for a show of solidarity from the churches of the world.

"The churches in the DRC want to continue to use their different avenues of influence in the country," said Döhne. "In doing so, they should be encouraged and supported by the worldwide ecumenical family."

- **Statement on sexual violence against women in the Democratic Republic of Congo adopted by WCC central committee, Geneva, Switzerland, 26 August–2 September 2009**

“No, my brother, do not force me; for such a thing is not done in Israel; do not do anything so vile! As for me, where could I carry my shame? And as for you, you would be as one of the scoundrels in Israel” (2 Samuel 13:12-14)

1. As the conflict in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) continues, the brutal crimes of sexual violence against women have massively increased and become pervasive in the country, especially since the beginning of the military operations in January 2009. Thousands of women and young girls have suffered due to rape and forced sexual slavery, often being forced to also serve as soldiers on the frontiers. As the special rapporteur on Violence against Women in her report to the United Nations (UN) Human Rights Council in February 2008 stated, “sexual violence has a defining feature of the DRCs armed conflict”. Women in areas of armed conflict suffer sexual violence committed by various actors such as the Forces Armées de la République Démocratique du Congo (FARDC), the Police Nationale Congolaise (PNC), various armed groups and increasingly, civilians as well.

2. The situation of increasing sexual violence against women is most acute in South Kivu, where non-governmental armed groups, particularly militia from neighbouring countries, commit sexual atrocities that are of an unimaginable brutality, which go beyond rape and aim at the complete physical and psychological destruction of women as sexual slaves with implications for the entire society. Women are brutally gang raped, often in front of their families and communities. In numerous cases, male relatives are forced at gunpoint to rape their own daughters, mothers or sisters. Such women often end up being infected by HIV and stigmatized by their families and, if married, they are often deserted by their husbands. A concern was also expressed that security and the justice system fall short of addressing the problems of sexual violence and that women survivors of rape lack sufficient care and protection. The majority of sexual violence cases reported in North Kivu since January have been attributed to government soldiers. There were incidences reported that, in the Equateur province, soldiers and police officers have also carried out systematic reprisals against local civilians, including mass rape. With the preparation of military operations to hunt down the Forces Démocratiques de Libération du Rwanda (FDLR) fighters, civilians are increasingly becoming the victims of murder, home invasion and rape. As they operate from forest areas, these armed groups raid local communities, engage in pillage, forced labour, rape and the enslavement of women and girls.

3. An independent UN human rights expert reported to the UN General Assembly last year that the scale and brutality of the sexual violence faced by women in the DRC amounts to war crimes and crimes against humanity. The UN Security Council Resolution 1820 of June 2008 noted that rape and other forms of sexual violence can constitute a war crime, a crime against humanity, or a constitutive act with respect to genocide. The resolution also stressed the need for the exclusion of sexual violence crimes from amnesty provisions in the context of conflict resolution processes and called upon member states to comply with their obligations for prosecuting persons responsible for such acts, to ensure that all victims of sexual violence, particularly women and girls, have equal protection under the law and equal access to justice. However, a climate of impunity for crimes against women predominates across the DRC and local authorities do little to stop it or prosecute those responsible for the crimes. The justice system falls short of addressing the problems of sexual violence and women survivors of rape lack sufficient care and protection and, consequently, most survivors are socially stigmatized and HIV positive. Even the UN does not seem to have resources and effective mechanisms to deal with such deprivation of human dignity.

4. While this alarming situation of sexual brutalization of women continues in the DRC, it is deplorable that churches are not coming forward to condemn these evil atrocities. The churches seem to relegate sexual violence to the private sphere, and still understand violence as exclusively physical, disregarding the psychological, sociological and spiritual effects entirely, as well as the breakdown of community. “Open secrets” of religio-cultural, social and even church practices which put women’s lives at risk continue unabated, while sexual violence and the risks of HIV infection increase at an alarming rate every day. The message to the WCCs eighth assembly, at the end of the Decade of Churches in Solidarity with Women (1988-1998), was that “violence against

women is a sin and therefore an offence against God". The mission of the church as a whole is to imitate the compassion of Jesus Christ for fullness of life for all. The church must participate with confidence and compassion in eradicating all forms of violence. The WCC reiterates the need for its member churches to ensure that the innocent are protected and the oppressed are freed. Instead of continuing with the unjust trend of blaming the victim or accusing the survivor, as if she is the one who is the sinner, the perpetrators of violence should be addressed for transformative justice. As Genesis 1:27 states, God created both male and female in his own image, as such male and female are equal and so violence against women is a sin and against God's will for fullness of life.

5. In view of the fact that all protective mechanisms have failed to combat the increasing sexual violence against women in the DRC, urgent measures have to be taken by various actors to prevent this dehumanization in that country. The survivors of sexual violence in the DRC need moral support to heal their wounds, to overcome gender-based discrimination and the continuous threat to their life and security. WCC member churches, civil society organizations, the Congolese government and the international community have responsibilities to address this concern.

The central committee of the WCC, meeting in Geneva, Switzerland, 26 August – 2 September 2009, therefore:

A. **Urges** WCC member churches to publically condemn violence against women and to make constructive efforts to overcome such violence by declaring that violence against women is a sin and by the development of clear sexual harassment policies that also spell out clearly the consequences of such harassments.

B. **Encourages** all WCC member churches to continue offering solidarity to the women of the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) so that they know that they are not alone in their struggles and by the initiation of public campaigns to combat violence in the framework of the WCC Decade to Overcome Violence (2001-2010).

C. **Appeals** to WCC member churches and civil society organizations to create the space for women to network with each other from all corners of the DRC and also with their sisters from the rest of the continent, as well as the rest of the world, in order to empower women through solidarity and promote healing.

D. **Calls** upon WCC member churches to humbly acknowledge their sin of omission by remaining silent regarding the deprivation of human dignity and the loss of life through AIDS suffered by women and to provide processes of repentance, forgiveness, transformation and restoration through a credible truth and reconciliation commission which consists of all stakeholders who have been accompanying victims of such abuses.

E. **Encourages** WCC member churches to commit themselves to working out ways of journeying together through pastoral and psychological care with all who bear the trauma that violence of different forms has caused them. This may include working with other organizations, specifically the women's department of the Eglise du Christ au Congo

(ECC), to develop vocational training for victims so that they can sustain themselves and also by promoting legal mechanisms so that the perpetrators of violence are brought to justice. The member churches are also encouraged to develop educational strategies which work with young boys and girls, in order to eliminate gender stereotypes.

F. *Urges* all parties to the armed conflict to immediately commit themselves to putting an end to all acts of sexual violence against women and girls in the DRC.

G. *Supports* the demand for the Congolese government (DRC) to end impunity for rape and to evolve effective strategies to combat sexual violence.

H. *Urges* the Congolese government (DRC) to bring to justice those responsible for committing sexual violence.

I. *Urges* that the Congolese government (DRC) guarantee the security of all its citizens and in particular protect women and girls from all forms of sexual violence.

J. *Supports* the recommendations made by the special rapporteur on Violence against Women to the UN Human Rights Council (February 2008) that the Congolese government, the UN, in particular the UN Mission in the DRC, the International Criminal Court and the international community implement adequate steps to end the sexual violence against women in the country.

K. *Requests* that the secretary general of the UN establishes directives and strategies that will enable the UN Mission in the DRC in the respect of its mandate to better protect civilians, especially women and girls who are trapped in combat zones, against all forms of sexual violence.

Eritrea

- **WCC delegation visit to Eritrea affirming WCC's commitment to churches engaged in peace, reconciliation and nation-building efforts, 16-19 May 2007**

At a meeting with President Isaias Afewerki, Kobia expressed that the WCC will continue advocating for peace and reconciliation in the region with special reference to the long-standing border dispute between Eritrea and Ethiopia. He also acknowledged the role played by the president in the peace processes in Eastern Sudan and in Darfur. President Afewerki said he would welcome greater involvement of the WCC in these processes.

The WCC general secretary paid a brief visit to the headquarters of the Eritrean Orthodox Tewahedo Church, which is the only WCC member in the country. Given the current

difficulties affecting the leadership of the church, Kobia only conveyed greetings to the members of the church staff, both lay and ordained who were present. He took advantage of the opportunity to learn firsthand about the situation through which the church is going.

During his visit Kobia met the president of the Evangelical Church of Eritrea (Lutheran), Rev. Asfah Mehari, and the general secretary of the Catholic Secretariat – Eparchy of Asmara, Abba Teclemicael Tewelde, as well as country representatives of Norwegian Church Aid, Dutch Interchurch Aid and the Lutheran World Federation.

The visit followed action taken on the situation in the Horn of Africa by the WCC executive committee in February this year. In a public statement the committee stressed the need for the Ethiopian and Eritrean governments to "reengage in efforts to resolve their long-standing border dispute in a peaceful and amicable manner". The committee also appealed to both governments to "foster dialogue with opposition political parties to establish democracy, human rights and the rule of law".

The WCC general secretary was accompanied by Dr Agnes Aboum, a member of the WCC central and executive committees and former WCC president from Africa, and by WCC staff Rev. Dr André Karamaga, responsible for Africa regional relations.

Horn of Africa

- **Statement on the situation in the Horn of Africa, WCC executive committee, Bossey, Switzerland, 27 February–2 March 2007**

BACKGROUND

1. The greater Horn of Africa, which encompasses Somalia, Ethiopia, Eritrea, Kenya, Sudan, Uganda and Djibouti has been the most troubled region of the Continent. The World Council of Churches has monitored, with growing concern, the developments in this region of strategic importance. In the Western Sudan region of Darfur, the conflict that has been taking place since early 2003 has shown little signs of improvement. While 7,000 African Union (AU) peacekeepers are now deployed in the region, they are currently overstretched and lack sufficient resources. The Government of Sudan refuses to allow a UN peacekeeping force in the region. In Southern Sudan, while the North-South civil war was officially brought to an end in January 2005, the implementation of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) has been facing many challenges. In Uganda, the August 2006 signing of a truce between the government of President Museveni and the Lord's Resistance Army held the promise of effectively putting an end to 21 years of civil war and devastation. Unfortunately, the peace talks held in Juba have now resulted in a stalemate. Tensions between Ethiopia and Eritrea over the resolution of the 1998-2000 border disputes still remain and have been mounting in recent years. In Kenya, sporadic tribal clashes, land dispute, etc. have taken place. At the political level, in the run-up to the Kenyan general election 2007, the current Constitution Review

Process is facing a number of challenges. In recent months, the conflict in Somalia has taken centre stage following the rise of the Union of Islamic Courts (UIC) in the summer of 2006 and the subsequent intervention of external forces and internationalization of the conflict. Following Ethiopia's military intervention in December 2006 in support of the Transitional Federal Government (TFG), the UIC has been driven out of Mogadishu, of which they had taken control in June 2006. as a result, the TFG has been able to start reasserting its authority. Nonetheless, the situation in Somalia remains volatile. Tensions remain high between the TFG and remnants of the UIC as well as between different Somali clans, threatening to impede the achievement of long term stability in the country as well as the region as whole.

2. Further complicating this situation is the tension between Ethiopia and Eritrea, both of whom are in turn allegedly supporting different sides of the Somalia conflict. Although violent conflict along Ethiopia-Eritrea border ended with the signing of the Algiers Agreement in 2000 and the ruling on April 13, 2002 by the Boundary Commission, the government of Eritrea has been on red alert for some time. Ethiopia and Eritrea have fought two bloody wars – first during the time of Eritrea's independence and in 1998 following Eritrea's claim to Badme land, and the second in the year 2002, around the time of the delineation of the border between the two countries by the United Nations Commission. The relationship between the two neighbours continues to be tense, especially following the defection from Ethiopia to Eritrea of about 100 military personnel led by a key military General and the support by Eritrea of groups opposed to the central government in Addis.

3. The motivations behind Ethiopia's involvement in Somalia, however, should not be simplified to a desire to wage a proxy war against Eritrea or for a quest for regional domination. Instead, Ethiopia, which was very hesitant to intervene militarily in Somalia, did so because of delays in the deployment of an African peacekeeping force in Somalia caused by lack of funds and the late lifting of the arms embargo. What finally triggered the intervention was the imminent threat posed by the UIC, which had assembled at the outskirts of Baidoa where the TFG had become confined. In addition, the situation in Somalia posed a very real internal security risk to Ethiopia. The UIC had indeed invited the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF), a group that threatens Ethiopia's unity and stability, to fight with them against the TFG. By doing this, the OLF hoped to later be able to use Somalia as a springboard for its campaign against the government in Addis. The UIC had also made various public statements proclaiming its support for the OLF. The Ethiopian government therefore had every reason to expect that a hostile government in Mogadishu would also support the Ogaden National Liberation Front (ONLF) and the Union Western Somalia Liberation Front (UWSLF) that receive sanctuary and support from Somalia.

4. Any strong support for ONLF and UWSLF will revive Somalia's post-independence goal of encouraging the Somali inhabited areas of Ethiopia to join it. Ethiopia, understandably, has therefore thrown its support behind the TFG, which does not favour such a policy. In addition, the UIC has at various times made statements to the effect that, as a fundamentalist religious group, they were interested in further expanding their influence in the region beyond their borders to include parts of Kenya and Ethiopia.

The terrorist threat emanating from Somalia should not be underestimated. Illustrations of this include: suicide bombings, an assassination attempt on President Yusuf's life on 18th September 2006, attempts on the lives of members of the TFG Parliament, the assassination of an Italian Catholic Nun in September 2006, and the assassination outside a mosque of Somalia Minister Abdallah Deerow Isaq July 2006. Similarly, not only were foreign jihadists recruited into Somalia, but Osama bin Laden's Deputy, Ayman al-Zawahari, called on Islamists world-wide to join in a fight against the Somali government and its Ethiopian allies. Finally, the UIC had, in the fall of 2006, demonstrated its lack of commitment to a negotiated peace process by violating an agreement signed in Khartoum on 22 June 2006. The UIC indeed failed to comply with such an agreement by engaging in fighting and capturing new territory.

5. Two additional factors should be considered when attempting to understand the regional dimensions of the conflict. First, following Eritrea's independence, Ethiopia became a landlocked country. Currently, it relies mainly on Djibouti as its outlet to the sea while at the same time trying to explore other options, including Somalia and Kenya. Control of Somalia by the UIC therefore poses an additional threat to Ethiopia, as it will not be able to use Somalia's coastline, becoming even more vulnerable and dependent on Djibouti. The relationship between Sudan and Ethiopia are now relatively good, however with recent developments in Sudan, including the death of Dr John Garang, hard-liners have increasingly begun to assert their influence over the federal government of Sudan. They have always had a long-term view of expanding their influence beyond their borders and would likely be sympathetic to the ideology and theology of the UIC. This, in turn, could further threaten Ethiopia and the region as a whole through Sudanese support for the UIC as well as for the OLF in Ethiopia.

6. In light of all these factors, Eritrea is likely to be the one taking advantage of the situation in Somalia, which in fact poses no direct threat to its national security, in an attempt to weaken its long-time foe, Ethiopia. The government of Eritrea has made little secret of its support to the UIC. According to a 2006 UN Report, diplomatic forces estimate 6,000 to 8,000 Ethiopian and 2,000 Eritrea troops in Somalia that back and support their respective allies. The presence of such troops is likely to introduce more arms into a country that is already awash with them and act as a major network for the inflow and outflow of arms threatening the stability of the region as a whole.

7. The stalled Ethiopia-Eritrea peace process could have made some positive contribution to security and stability in the region. While it would not have had a direct impact on Somalia, an improvement in relations between the two countries would have led to increased collaboration within the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD), which in turn would have assisted in the stabilization of the region. Unfortunately, the peace process is intertwined with troubled political transition and growing authoritarianism in the two countries. The leadership in the two countries have effectively crushed dissent and have come down hard on civil society organizations and opposition political groups. In order to justify restrictions on political activities and to deny their people democratic accountability and the rule of law, the two governments

have at times used the pretext of threats to national security to keep cross-border tension high. The reports coming from Eritrea also indicate a high rate of religious persecution.

8. The present developments have implications for the Greater Horn of Africa and pose a threat to international peace and security. Indeed, if the UIC was to take control of Somalia and in light of its links to Al-Qaeda, the country could become a breeding ground for radical Islamists groups' intent on waging wars against other governments. Somalia has always been part of the Horn of Africa's "conflict system." While the international community had stepped back from Somalia in the last decade, the current situation has led to renewed attention and involvement including from countries such as Kenya, Djibouti, Ethiopia, Sudan, Britain, Italy and the United States. The US has, in the wake of Ethiopia's intervention, which it implicitly supported, launched a number of military air strikes with the objective of capturing those suspected to be responsible for the 1998 bombing of US embassies in Kenya and Tanzania. According to their Department of State, the US has three policy goals in Somalia: to remove the terrorist threat existent in Somalia and ensure against Somalia's use as a terrorist base to prevent developments in Somalia from threatening regional peace and stability, and to overcome the long-term governance challenges that terrorists exploit to make Somalia their base. Unfortunately, American involvement might have added to the impression of Christian-Muslim tensions in the region. While it may be incorrect to reduce the conflict to a mere contest between "Islamists" Somalia and "Christian" Ethiopia, this religious appendage appeals to both sides in terms of gaining patronage and favour of Muslim and Christian groups inside and outside the region.

9. The World Council of Churches and its member churches have a history of accompanying churches in Africa, including the Horn, in critical situations, providing pastoral care, humanitarian aid and assistance and working on issues of justice, peace and reconciliation. In September 1999, the central committee of the World Council of Churches in a Minute on Peace and Reconciliation between Ethiopia and Eritrea stated: "the World Council of Churches and many of its member churches and related agencies around the world have been deeply concerned about the conflict between Ethiopia and Eritrea which has been raging with ever greater intensity since May 1998. We have grieved at the terrible, mounting toll of human life this war is again inflicting on people who have suffered so terribly and for so long from war, repression and abject poverty. Immediately after the outbreak of hostilities the general secretary wrote to the leaders of the two countries, imploring them to stop the fighting and to resolve the border issue which was the immediate source of contention by peaceful means". The WCC, in support of its action, sent an ecumenical delegation that included representatives of All Africa Conference of Churches (AACC) to the two countries as an expression of solidarity and support. Together with Norwegian Church Aid, the Council facilitated a series of meetings between the religious leaders of the two countries to promote a peaceful and negotiated settlement.

10. The present crisis in the Horn of Africa poses multiple challenges that have to be addressed by the international community, especially the UN Security council, the AU, IGAD and the League of Arab States The recent dramatic turn of events in Somalia, last

December, has once again brought the country under international focus. The UN Security Council Resolution 1725 promoted by the United States was adopted by consensus despite hesitation by some members of the Council who cautioned against IGASOM's⁵⁸ potentially destabilising impact.

11. At present some fear that there are too many conflicting interests and little political will among external actors to exert sufficient concerted influence to stabilise Somalia. The African Union Peace and Security Council estimates that the projected mission of 8000 troops in Somalia (IGASOM) would cost 160 million US dollars for six months deployment. To date, Uganda and Nigeria have firmly committed troops to such a mission while Burundi, Ghana and Malawi have also made pledges. Such commitments, however, fall short of the 8000 troops needed. The United Nations has sent a humanitarian assessment mission to Somalia's border with Kenya where thousands of internally displaced persons (IDPs) have gathered to escape the fighting. The African Union (AU) has also recently sent a mission to Mogadishu to assess the situation on the ground and to prepare a safe environment for the planned peacekeeping force. Aid commitments have also been made by the US and the European Union for short-term humanitarian assistance and support to IGASOM.

12. An immediate action to stabilise Somalia revolve around the introduction of the AU Peacekeepers to replace the Ethiopians who are not welcomed by the Somali leaders, even though the Ethiopians were invited and accepted by the TFG and benefited from the tacit support of Somalis in Puntland and Somaliland. The main opposition to Ethiopia's intervention is seen to emerge from sections of the Hawiye clan in Mogadishu. Current efforts are also meant to encourage an inclusive political dialogue amongst its various political forces and clans. It is hoped that the process of dialogue and engagement will help broaden the TFG's base of support and pave the way towards democratic elections to be held in the country within the next few years.

13. The churches in the region under the leadership of AACC and in cooperation with WCC and other international ecumenical partners like the Life and Peace Institute and Norwegian Church Aid have closely monitored the recent developments in the greater Horn of Africa through visits and consultations. Two major events have taken place in this connection – the first one was held in Nairobi on 24th and 25th October 2006 on the "Somalia Peace Process" and the second in Dar-es-Salam, 3rd and 4th February 2007 on – "Christian and Muslim Leaders Peace Initiative in Somalia". Both events indicate the growing concern among Churches and Christians on developments in Somalia that have serious implications for the region. Muslim representatives have also expressed concern over the current situation as well as indicated their willingness to cooperate with Christian religious leaders in dealing with the peace process in Somalia.

The executive committee of the World Council of Churches meeting in Geneva, 27th February to 2nd March 2007:

⁵⁸ IGASOM – Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) mission in Somalia (U.N. Security Council Resolution 1725)

- a) ***acknowledges*** the role played by the religious communities in Ethiopia, Eritrea and the wider ecumenical fellowship to help resolve the border dispute between the two countries and encourages them to continue these efforts, and appreciates the work being done by the Churches and related agencies and commends them for their witness and their response to the crisis in the Horn of Africa, assuring them full support of the WCC and its member churches as they continue to be a prophetic voice in the region in general and in Somalia in particular;
- b) ***calls upon*** the WCC to remain seized of this matter and in co-operation with AACC encourage and facilitate the establishment of a joint Christian and Muslim Peace Committee for Somalia;
- c) ***expresses*** its concerns at the deteriorating human rights situation in Ethiopia and Eritrea and appeals to the respective governments of the two countries to foster dialogue with opposition political parties to establish democracy, human rights and the rule of law;
- d) ***reiterates*** the need for the United Nations and the donor countries to impress upon Ethiopia and Eritrea, the need to reengage in efforts to resolve their long standing border dispute in a peaceful and amicable manner by complying with the ruling of the Boundary Commission, and appeals to the international community to focus its attention on Somalia and the Horn of Africa as a whole and for the United Nations Security Council to remain seized of this matter;
- e) ***supports*** the TFG in its efforts to bring services to the people of Somalia and to build the institutions that are needed to promote stability, democracy, rule of law and development, and urges it to undertake a comprehensive peace and reconciliation process among the people as a whole, including moderate members of the UIC;
- f) ***welcomes*** efforts by the Sudanese government towards reconciliation in the East of the country following the signing of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement;
- g) ***welcomes also***, the signing of a truce agreement between the Lord's Resistance Army and the Government of Uganda and urges both parties to resume the stalled peace;
- h) ***urges*** IGAD to undertake the task of healing divisions within its members and to work closely with the League of Arab States in order to strengthen its efforts in Somalia, and appeals to the international community and the Contact Group for Somalia to ensure that adequate funds are available for the stabilization mission in Somalia;
- i) ***appreciates*** the commitments of troops that have already been made and calls upon other countries in Africa to follow suit in order to bring the strength of the required levels of 8,000 troops and thus enable immediate withdrawal of Ethiopian troops;
- j) ***calls for*** support for the people of Somalia displaced by the conflict, who are in dire need of humanitarian assistance and security, particularly the Somali refugees in

Dadaab Camps in Kenya. In this connection it appreciates the assistance being provided by ACT International through its Rapid Response Fund to the Somali IDPs.

Liberia and Sierra Leone

- **Synthesized report from “Living letters” ecumenical team visit to Liberia and Sierra Leone, 2-8 November 2008**

Soon after independence in April 27 1961, a military coup overthrew the civilian government of Sierra Leone in 1967. In latter years, other coups and attempted coups took place. The political instability from independence contributed to the county plunging into civil war in 1991. The situation in Sierra Leone was exacerbated by neighbouring Liberia, which was also in a civil war that had begun in 1989. It is reported that former Liberian President Charles Taylor supported the Revolutionary United Front (RFU) in Sierra Leone. RFU was a rebel army that led and committed atrocities in Sierra Leone during the war. The war was officially declared over in January 2002 and 2003 in Liberia and Sierra Leone respectively. An estimated 50,000 in Sierra Leone and 200,000 people in Liberia were killed in the over a decade civil wars.

Sierra Leone is in the North of Liberia. Both countries are on the Atlantic Ocean in West Africa. Besides these geographic bonds, the 2 countries also share a grisly past.

Each of this country was involved in one of the bloodiest civil wars and for both the war lasted for over a decade. These mixed commonalities, motivated the Living Letters to plan a visit to both countries at the same time. The ten day visit in November 2008 was an eye opener to the living letters. They learnt how churches, the people and their leaders were tapping into the reservoir of hope demonstrated by seven years of peace since the war ended.

It was a rare opportunity for the two countries to share their sour past experiences. To show how they were coping with their life, their efforts to rebuild, reconcile and their journey to peaceful existence.

Church leaders and government – International Ecumenical Peace Convocation (IEPC)

Some effects of war or any conflict is the divisions that come with it. This could be institutionally, ethnically, inter-generational and/or family divisions. Liberia and Sierra Leone were no exceptions to such consequences of war. However, 8 years of peace, has seen the church continue to mend those divisions. A key role that the churches in both countries have played since the war erupted. The war seemed to remind the churches of their divine call to unity. The efforts have led to a unique relation between the government and the churches. Churches are close and at a distance from the government. Close enough to cooperate with the government in reconciliation and peace building. They are also far enough to critic the government where they see laxity, lack of integrity

or accountability. This unique relation between the churches in the two countries is a lesson that could be emulated by others at the IEPC.

The Living Letters met head of state of Sierra Leone, his Excellency President Earnest Bai Koroma. His comments hailed churches' contribution in bringing positive change in the country. In relation to the decade to overcome violence (DOV), the president was optimistic that; "by the time the decade comes to an end, Sierra Leone will have something positive to show... by 2011, Sierra Leone will be a shining example."

The state shared more with the Living Letters through the Ministry of Trade. The minister, Hon Alimamy Koroma is a former general secretary of the Christian Council of Sierra Leone (CCSL). He explained that both Liberia and Sierra Leone are working towards consolidating the peace they have won. He also acknowledged the involvements of churches and civil society organizations in the processes of healing the memories of war and in peace building. He stressed the role that the global community of churches can play to be a moral guarantor for weaker nations.

In Liberia, similar sentiments were echoed by the minister of information, Hon. Dr Lawrence Bropleh. While agreeing with the president in building the nation, the Minister said that, "The president believes that Liberia must become a post war success."

Dr Bropleh also expressed the country's deep appreciation for the role of the churches in Liberia, working through the Liberian Council of Churches, played during and after the war. He considered the Liberian Council of Churches as a key partner in ensuring a secure Liberia. Despite the country being a secular state, he believes that the churches have a key role in moulding people's virtues, morals and instilling hope in their lives. He demonstrated a strong ecumenical fervor and pledged support to LCC in its work. He saw the presence of the WCC Living Letters team as a concrete reminder of the caring heart of the WCC.

The ministry hosts a radio program; "changing minds and changing attitudes." This is one of the ways the Ministry is committed to the course of building a stable Liberia. These in deed are achievements both for churches and their governments. They are encouragements to be shared at the I.E.P.C in Jamaica Living Letters interacted with youth groups, women groups and theology students. These groups and others in different parts of the two countries raised issues that revolved around the church and government. Youths in Liberia talked of unemployment and "post warlords," among other challenges that the government should address.

The women were more specific on what they would like to see in their county:

- Women empowerment programs that would equip them with skills such as tailoring, entrepreneur and computer skills.
- Organize forums of women and men aimed at addressing social problems e.g. domestic violence.
- Global solidarity in prayer for women especially in Africa
- Enhancement of Legal structures to deal with the perpetrators of sexual and domestic violence.

- Organize a women conference across neighbouring countries that were affected by the war. They specified Liberia, Sierra Leone, Guinea and Ghana.

Church leaders expressed similar concerns as the youth in relation to warlords. Instead of seeking forgiveness, perpetrators of war, who are known to people, deny their involvement when testifying at the Truth & Reconciliation Commission (TSC). Female youth raised their fears of increased cases of women abuse, rape and domestic violence. From an ecumenical point of view, the two countries which have had cordial relations can learn from each other. Sierra Leone for example has been overcoming domestic violence by creating awareness on human rights among the populace and enactment of legislations that support women.

During the visit, the United Methodist Church in Liberia gave the Living Letters a cake to take to the people and churches of Sierra Leone through the Sierra Leone council of churches. The cake was given as a symbol of unity by the church and people of Liberia to their fellow brothers and sisters in Sierra Leone. It was a symbol of reconciliation and maintaining stability between the two countries. The cake would also be shared with WCC. This implied that the church supports and is in solidarity with WCC in its work of advancing a peace message to the world through the Living Letters. This is one of the examples of churches deepening contact among themselves and with WCC through the Living Letters programme.

Kenya

- **Statement by WCC general secretary on post-election violence in Kenya, 2 January 2008**

The people of Kenya and their many friends in countries and in churches around the world are appalled and concerned as the outcome of the recent elections has descended into violence. The killings, beatings and burnings are causing much loss, suffering and fear. We pray that God will protect all who remain at risk.

Now is the time for leadership and statesmanship for the good of the nation from the leaders of Kenya's two main parties, the Party of National Unity and the Orange Democratic Movement. As leaders, they must turn urgently from partisan postures and negotiate in good faith to reach a non-violent, political solution to Kenya's electoral dispute.

As statesmen, they must rekindle national and international confidence in their intentions. An independent investigation of the electoral dispute is necessary and should be monitored by international observers. Now is the time to put the interests of the nation and the surrounding region above other concerns.

We call on the churches of Kenya to do their part in pursuing the common good of their communities and country. Churches have a leading role to play in ensuring respect for human life and seeking reconciliation between neighbours. This is especially urgent amid ominous signs of ethnically targeted hatred and violence. Homes, businesses, public buildings and places of worship must remain safe.

We also appeal to churches abroad to provide humanitarian aid through ecumenical partners in Kenya to communities affected by the violence. We would like to assure the churches and people of Kenya that the World Council of Churches stands ready to support the process of dialogue and reconciliation that is now necessary.

The violent perversion of public life in Kenya at present cannot be accepted in a New Year or at anytime. After the immediate measures are taken, and while the current troubles are still fresh in the nation's mind, it will be necessary to have a frank and thorough appraisal of underlying constitutional and electoral issues that have damaged previous Kenyan elections as well as this one. We register this concern now in order to strengthen the rule of law, improve governance and save lives in Kenya in the future.

Rev. Dr Samuel Kobia
General secretary
World Council of Churches

- **Statement by WCC general secretary on initiatives to overcome violence in Kenya, 9 January 2008**

The World Council of Churches welcomes the initiative taken by people of faith all across Kenya to continue praying for a peaceful end to the crisis that swept through the country following the violent aftermath of the recent elections.

While the situation continues to be critical, some signs of hope can be seen. In the context of diffusing tension and promoting a constructive dialogue between the parties, we welcome the decision of Hon. Raila Odinga to call off public rallies and we are pleased that President Kibaki has invited opposition leader Raila Odinga and religious leaders to a meeting on Friday as well as Ghanaian President John Kufuor, in his position as the AU chairman, to visit the country.

We hope that his visit will help break the political stalemate and that his efforts to get President Mwai Kibaki and opposition leader Raila Odinga to meet and work toward ending the country's crisis and moving toward healing and national reconciliation will be met with success. Peace efforts should be supported by the government, the opposition and the whole civil society. We call on the political leaders, especially President Kibaki and Hon. Raila Odinga, to refrain from taking decisions that might frustrate the process towards dialogue for a peaceful resolution of the conflict.

At the same time we want to recognize and applaud how the churches of Kenya are doing their part in pursuing the common good of their communities and country. There is an urgent need to put an end to the mayhem of violence and the churches of Kenya know they have a leading role to play in the process of peace, reconciliation and healing.

Churches should be on the front line in ensuring respect for human life and seeking peace and reconciliation. This is a time when the ministry of healing and reconciliation of the churches is deeply needed in the country.

During the last weeks churches have been strongly involved in resolving the situation and calling for peace. It was through the hard work of the general secretary of the All Africa Conference of Churches and other religious leaders that Nobel peace laureate Archbishop Desmond Tutu was able to visit Kenya at the height of the violence and initiate the process of dialogue between the government and opposition.

The National Council of Churches of Kenya (NCCCK) sponsored a peace march held last Saturday while churches throughout the country joined in prayers for peace in Sunday services. Church leaders must continue to rise above ethnic differences and politics and call for an end to the disputes.

We appeal to churches around the world to continue to pray for the Kenyan people and churches and to provide humanitarian aid through ecumenical partners in Kenya to communities affected by the violence.

The World Council of Churches continues to monitor closely the developments in the country and praises the work of the Kenyan churches. We encourage them to continue their witness. For our part, the WCC is preparing a Living Letters delegation to visit the country in the coming weeks for the purpose of showing the solidarity of churches around the world with our brothers and sisters in Kenya.

Living Letters is part of the WCC initiative Decade to Overcome Violence. Teams of international church leaders visit churches in situations of conflict offering support and encouragement in overcoming violence.

Rev. Dr Samuel Kobia
General secretary
World Council of Churches

- **Letter from WCC general secretary to the Heads of WCC member churches in Kenya expressing concern and assuring them of support following the recent violence, 16 January 2008**

My dear brothers in Christ,

Grace and peace be with you all. I bring you greetings from Geneva, trusting that God in His mercy is with you and your flock.

The World Council of Churches has been following the developments in Kenya in the aftermath of the elections held on 27 December last year. We have issued two public statements (copies attached) expressing our concern and assuring you and the Kenyan people of our prayerful support. We have watched with disbelief the level of violence and destruction of property in many parts of the country, the most appalling being the burning of people alive in a church, a sacred place of worship. The images shown on the TV screens around the world portray a country that one would hardly recognize as Kenya, which over the years has been an oasis of peace and tranquillity in an ocean of turbulence and violence. We continue to pray for God's intervention so that Kenya may be saved from degenerating to deeper levels of violence, hatred and bitterness.

As World Council of Churches we have also appealed for humanitarian aid from our partners. Through ACT (Action by Churches Together) International we have mobilized resources to respond to the urgent human need among the displaced persons and those affected by the violence. We shall continue to seek more support while hoping that the worst is behind us and life will go back to normal, making further aid unnecessary.

Thirdly, we have been thinking of how best to translate our prayerful support into visible expressions of solidarity with the churches and the Kenyan people. This has led us to decide to send *Living Letters* on a pastoral and solidarity visit to Kenya. In so doing, we invoke St Paul's notion, where the delegation of 12 people we are sending to you will "be known and read by all, ... written not with ink but with the Spirit of the Living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts" (2 Co 3:2-3). From 30 January to 3 February 2008, those brothers and sisters from different parts of the world and from different confessional traditions represented in the fellowship of the World Council of Churches will come to pray with you, to console the bereaved, to mourn with those who mourn and above all to accompany you spiritually in seeking God's guidance in bringing about peace, reconciliation and healing.

By sending you the *Living Letters*, the World Council of Churches is keeping a practice we have initiated many years ago of striving to establish personal contacts with people who find themselves in distress for whatever reason. It is a way of saying that we feel part of the same family, and when and where any part of the family hurts, we hurt with them. So, brothers in Christ, please receive the *Living Letters* in that spirit. We have hope in the God of love, peace and reconciliation that Kenya will overcome the prevailing situation and that the churches will play an important part in speeding up that time when, once again, the Kenyan people will continue to live in peace and harmony anywhere in the country. We assure you of our full support in your role as religious leaders in this process. We know that at times such as these, Kenyans look up to you to rise beyond political and ethnic divide and help to reconcile and heal the land. May the loving and gracious God give you the capacity to do just that.

May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God the Father and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with us all now and forever more.

Yours in His Service,
Rev. Dr Samuel Kobia
General secretary

cc: Rev. Canon Peter Karanja, general secretary, NCKK
Bishop Mvume Dandala, general secretary, AACC

- **Statement on the crisis in Kenya and the churches' response, WCC central committee, Geneva, Switzerland, 13–20 February 2008**

*“You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul,
and with all your mind.”*

This is the greatest and first commandment. And a second is like it:

“You shall love your neighbour as yourself.”

*On these two commandments hang all the law
and the prophets. (Matthew 22:36-40)*

1. Kenya and its many communities are going through an extremely painful experience following heavily contested elections. Hundreds of people have been killed and thousands more have been wounded or maimed. Hundreds of thousands of citizens have been forced to flee from their homes. In the shadows of chaos, unknown numbers of women and girls have been subjected to sexual violence. People living with HIV and AIDS have been cut off from medical care. Uncounted homes and businesses have been looted and burned and many livelihoods destroyed.

2. Kenya's presidential elections of 27 December 2007 were followed by accusations and counter-accusations between the main opposition party and the ruling party about whether the ballot had been manipulated or sabotaged. The violence that followed shook a country that only weeks earlier was admired for a robust electoral contest and, five years ago, became a model for peaceful democratic change in Africa when its people insisted on the implementation of a multi-party political system.

3. Churches around the world have followed these events with concern and sorrow, with soul searching and prayer, with gifts of assistance and actions of solidarity, including the mediation efforts of the National Council of Churches of Kenya (NCC Kenya), Kenya's Interreligious Forum, the All Africa Conference of Churches (AACC) and the “Living Letters” delegation of the World Council of Churches in January 2008.

4. Signs of a turning-back from confrontation and violence now give cause for cautious hope. Standing as Kenya's neighbours in a global village, we thank God for the many peace-making efforts by churches and join with the sentiments expressed by the AACC: Speaking in the darkest hour of crisis, the Nairobi-based council called Kenya “the steward of Africa's collective hope” and said their host nation's “joys have become our joys and therefore its pains, our pains...The theology of the body of Christ urges us to be

available for one another, not only for those who share at the common sacramental table, but for the world for which Christ died”.

5. The disastrous aftermath of the elections should be understood within the broader social and historical context of Kenya. The root causes of the kind of violence that has raged for weeks can be traced to pre-independence and post-colonial political dispensations. The constitution crafted at the dawn of independence in 1963 should have been understood as a transitional instrument. It did not deal sufficiently with critical issues such as land ownership and a bill of rights. Subsequent constitutional changes gave mixed signals or were inadequate: making Kenya a *de jure* single party state in 1982, reverting to multi-party democracy in 1991 and making a spirited but inconclusive attempt to write a new constitution prior to the recent elections. Another much-needed measure – electoral reform, including a truly independent electoral commission – is still pending, now at great cost.

6. The current constitution and certain government institutions appear to have been misused to meet partisan political interests rather than the interests and aspirations of ordinary Kenyans. A presidency that is predicated upon the politics of patronage, without institutionalized power-sharing, hardly inspires people’s confidence that the public interest will be met. The perceived pattern is that gaining public office benefits the winner’s community more than others in the constituency. The difficulty of gaining a seat or a tendency to hold onto power year after year only strengthens the popular conviction that this form of democracy is defective and must be repaired. Unless it is repaired, future presidential elections may be just as intractable as this one and potentially as dangerous to the nation. This need to build public trust in government is not unique to Kenya.

7. While the current conflict is a consequence of disputed presidential elections, the communities in conflict have long-standing and often unvoiced concerns dating back to independence, when many Kenyans felt that their communal expectations were not met. The independent government inherited colonial structures and then failed to address certain injustices and inequalities that divided the nation. Issues that affected many communities and various ethnic groups went unresolved. A negative colonial legacy grew into a post-colonial political problem. External factors also continued in new ways and old, influencing the political culture, shaping expectations of a growing population and driving key sectors of the national economy.

8. Churches of the WCC gave early notice of such trends in Africa in a statement on Unity and Human Rights in Africa Today by the WCC central committee in 1971, “The interference of rich and powerful foreign nations offers the most serious threat to the stability and development of African nations, and makes the solution of the existing problems of tribalism and internal dissidence more difficult”. These political, social and economic forces, the committee said, “menace the aspirations of the African peoples for unity and for a human existence in full dignity and independence”.

Sobered by the reality of inter-communal violence, seized of the need for churches to discern their role in times of deep crisis, and convinced of the capacity for societies to allocate power with accountability, the central committee of the World Council of Churches, meeting in Geneva, Switzerland, 13–20 February 2008:

A. **Recognizes** that churches were among those implicated in the crisis and, as the NCC Kenya has stated, were “unable to effectively confront these issues” because of partisanship;

B. **Affirms** church leaders and members who became advocates for peace and unity during Kenya’s electoral crisis, and commends the same role to churches in comparable crises elsewhere;

C. **Urges** that churches in countries facing related crises learn with the churches of Kenya about the need, for example, to issue joint calls to end violence, to do so as promptly as possible, to speak out consistently for the protection of human life, and to demonstrate the Christian commitment to peace by taking an active part in on-going processes of mediation, reconciliation and healing between the parties in conflict;

D. **Recommends** that, when societies become deeply divided and where it is possible, member churches and councils of churches support platforms for dialogue among government, opposition and civil society leaders where they may hear alternative views, debate differences, agree to negotiate, and take steps to prevent, reduce and stop violence;

E. **Encourages** churches to initiate and participate in efforts to build up interfaith collaboration and advocacy for peace and reconciliation, noting the work of the Interreligious Forum in Kenya;

F. **Affirms** the need for church members and leaders to promote a culture of dialogue – in church, between churches and in society – where diverse groups are made welcome, where differences are addressed and where, as far as conscience permits, partisan political alignments are avoided and the common good prevails; **further affirming** the hope that relationships between churches may be bridges across divided communities and a safety net in times of crisis;

G. **Encourages** churches to be actively involved in programmes of civic education and education for democracy, human rights and the dignity and equality of women and men, and to take part in programmes to monitor and follow-up electoral processes;

H. **Applauds** the wider African and international community engagement in mediation and conflict resolution efforts, such as the work of the African Union and the counsel offered by distinguished African leaders; and **encourages** the provision of humanitarian assistance to people who are displaced or returning home, especially through Action by Churches Together.

Nigeria

- **Letter of concern to Mr Umaru Musa Yar'Adua, president of the Federal Republic of Nigeria over the recent violent clashes in northern Nigeria, 4 August 2009**

Your Excellency,

On behalf of the World Council of Churches, I am writing to you to express our concern regarding the recent violence that erupted in Maiduguri and other areas of northern Nigeria following clashes between members of Boko Haram, a militant Islamist group, and the security forces that left hundreds dead during the past week. It is unfortunate that Maiduguri has seen the worst of this unrest after the uprising that began in Bauchi state and spread to four other northern states of Nigeria.

Nigeria has long suffered from ethno-religious conflicts, communal and political tensions and surges in militant activities, which have frequently led to violence in different parts of the country. It is unfortunate that inter-communal violence has already claimed the lives of more than 12,000 Nigerians during the past decade. We have also learnt that the civilian fallout from clashes between the military and armed militants and from outbreaks of sectarian violence has cost hundreds of lives lost over the past two years. Reports from various sources confirmed the fact that the reasons for this violence are rooted in politics rather than religion. Widespread poverty, corruption, poor governance and political instability continue to push the country towards violence and insecurity. All these events are taking place without comprehensive and drastic measures to address widespread unemployment and poverty in the country. It is also a matter of concern that these conflicts have been exacerbated by state-sponsored abuses by the security forces, including extra-judicial killings and torture.

Although it is a known fact that Your Excellency's government has inherited several of these problems from the previous administration, we view as promising certain policy initiatives established under your administration, including the formation of a committee on police reform and a presidential panel to investigate the 2008 inter-communal violence in Jos. However, it is our considered opinion that these initiatives have yet to make a tangible impact on the lives of ordinary Nigerians who are constantly facing blatant violations of their human and fundamental rights.

We therefore urge Your Excellency to pay serious attention to the situation in the northern states of Nigeria; to ensure the safety of all citizens in the areas now afflicted with violence; and to ensure that all perpetrators responsible for these acts of violence and human rights violations are brought to justice.

Respectfully yours,
Rev. Dr Samuel Kobia
WCC general secretary

- **Letter from WCC general secretary to churches in Nigeria expressing profound sorrow and shock at the outbreak of violence in Maiduguri, 4 August 2009**

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

It is with great shock and profound sorrow that we heard the news of the tragic outbreak of communal violence in Maiduguri and four northern states in Nigeria this past week. The resultant 800 deaths and immense suffering of hundreds of people in northern Nigeria has saddened us immensely. Together with you, we condemn and deplore such wanton acts of violence.

We have received the troubling news that more than fifty Christians have been killed in Maiduguri during the recent conflict (including a pastor) and that at least 13 churches belonging to Ekklesiyar Yan'uwa a Nigeria (EYN) and Church of Christ in Nigeria (COCIN) have been destroyed during this period.

As you are aware by now, I have written a letter of concern to His Excellency Umaru Musa Yar'Adua, president of the Federal Republic of Nigeria. In my letter, I urge him to ensure the safety of all citizens in the areas now afflicted with violence in the northern Nigerian states and ensure that all perpetrators of these acts of violence and human rights violations be brought to justice.

We extend to the families of the victims our sincere sympathy, and express our solidarity with all those who are suffering and undergoing traumatic experiences. We shall continue to pray for peace and reconciliation among the people and communities of your troubled region, especially in Bauchi, Yobe, and Borno states.

May God Almighty continue to strengthen you to "seek peace and pursue it" (Psalm 34:14).

Yours in Christ's love,
Rev. Dr Samuel Kobia
WCC general secretary

Somalia

- **Message sent to Rt Rev. Dr Mvume Dandala, AACC general secretary, on Muslim Christian leaders peace initiative on Somalia, 3-4, February 2007, Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, 26 January 2007**

Dear Mvume,

I greet you warmly in the name of the World Council of Churches on the occasion of the conference of Muslim and Christian leaders Peace Initiative on Somalia.

Caring for the wellbeing of all humankind is an important dimension of Christian discipleship in these times of violence and conflict. The vision of a world of justice and peace is the corner stone of our Gospel. While perfecting of a just peace is beyond the possibility of human achievement, it is within the power of the Sovereign God of Love who has created one whole, indivisible human family in a covenant of peace. We as human beings are committed to this vision of peace.

Unfortunately, ours is a broken and fractured world because of violence and conflict. This situation makes it imperative for people of faith to come together in initiatives that are geared to promote healing and reconciliation within and between communities. The All Africa Conference of Churches has taken a significant step forward in promoting interreligious dialogue for peace in Somalia, a country whose people have suffered tremendously as a result of intermittent wars since the early 1990s. Inter clan wars have taken the lives of an estimated 3000 people and 1.5 million have been rendered homeless and forced to seek refuge in neighbouring countries.

The World Council of Churches remains strongly committed to engagement and dialogue between faith communities on issues and in struggles for justice and peace. Today more than ever before there is a call for an intensification of the dialogue of religions and cultures. In the case of Somalia it is a dialogue of life for the future generation of the country. We hope this initiative of interreligious cooperation between the people of the two communities will lead to building a much-needed culture of peace.

We pray for the success of the meeting and take this opportunity to assure you of our prayers and full support.

Yours sincerely,
Rev. Dr Samuel Kobia
General secretary

South Africa

- **Visit of Archbishop Desmond Tutu to the WCC, 20 May 2008**

Caring and compassion will prevail over evil and injustice

"Evil, injustice, oppression, all of those awful things, they are not going to have the last word. Goodness, laughter, joy, caring, compassion, the things that you do and you help others do, those are going to prevail," said Archbishop Desmond Tutu in Geneva today.

The South African Nobel Peace Prize laureate was addressing ecumenical officers of churches from all over the world as well as staff from ecumenical organizations headquartered at Geneva's ecumenical centre.

Recalling the struggle against apartheid in his country, Tutu affirmed the empowerment felt by anti-apartheid activists when knowing that people all over the world were praying for them. "When you know someone is praying for you, in Alaska, by name, what chance does the apartheid government have?"

Tutu thanked the World Council of Churches (WCC) for its "costly solidarity" at the time of the anti-apartheid struggle. "We would not be free had not been for the steadfast support of the WCC, which cost the WCC a very big deal" he said.

Tutu advocates for HIV-positive children

Later on the same day, Tutu addressed the 61st World Health Assembly taking place in Geneva from 19-24 May 2008. Holding up a t-shirt proclaiming "HIV Positive Kids Need Treatment," he highlighted the need to address the challenges faced in relation to HIV positive children. "Children are dying of easily preventable diseases," he added.

According to the Ecumenical Advocacy Alliance, almost 800 children die of AIDS-related illnesses every day. The latest figures from UNAIDS indicate that approximately 2.1 million children under 15 are living with HIV; nearly 90 percent of them live in sub-Saharan Africa.

At the World Health Assembly, Tutu affirmed the contribution of Christian organizations to international efforts for better health care: "Together WHO and WCC share a common mission to the world, protecting and restoring body, mind, and spirit," he said. "It is important that this is also the 40th anniversary of the Christian Medical Commission, whose values and experience in Primary Health Care informed and shaped the 1974 WHO Guidelines for Primary Health Care, which were reaffirmed at [the 1978 International Conference on Primary Health Care in] Alma Ata. You see, faith and health have been together a very long time."

Tutu served on the WCC staff as associate director of the Theological Education Fund from 1972-1975.

The WCC brought an ecumenical delegation of 118 representatives from grassroots and advocacy movements around the world to the World Health Assembly. This year's focus is on primary health care, public health, innovation and intellectual property, the rational use of medicines, alcoholism, and nutrition.

- **Letter from WCC general secretary to member churches in South Africa and the South African Council of Churches regarding wave of xenophobic attacks and murders, 6 June 2008**

Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

The Bible demands that, "The strangers who sojourn with you shall be to you as the natives among you, and you shall love them as yourself; for you were strangers in the land of Egypt" (Leviticus 19:33-34).

We are deeply saddened by the brutal wave of violent xenophobic attacks and murders of foreign nationals, migrant workers and refugees occurring since early May in South Africa. We raise our voice along with the South African Council of Churches (SACC)'s general secretary, Mr Eddie Makue, who stated that "As people of faith, we strongly condemn the use of violence and intimidation, particularly insofar as it is targeted against strangers and uprooted people," He continued, "Christian scriptures, in common with those of the other great faiths, contain numerous passages asserting believers' responsibility to show hospitality to strangers and to protect society's most vulnerable members, including aliens."

Increasing numbers people live in multi-cultural, multi-ethnic, multi-religious and multi-lingual societies. In some places people are forced to leave their home countries because of political, economic or social reasons in the hope of a better future for them and their families elsewhere. In an April 2008 public statement of the World Council of Churches and the Middle East Council of Churches on the changing ecclesial context, "Impact of migration on living together", adopted at the Armenian Catholicosate of the Holy See of Cilicia, Antelias Beirut, Lebanon, it was stated that "Migrants are not commodities, illegal aliens or mere victims. They are human beings. Migrant rights are human rights. We must respect the human dignity of every migrant and give holistic consideration to their needs, their strengths and the economic, social and cultural contributions they make to society. Above all, we must stand in solidarity with migrants and migrant churches, accompany them and include them in the decision-making that effects and governs their lives." The statement went on to say that "While we continue to see the impact of migration only in narrow terms, we will fail to come to grips with the economic potential of migrants, the role remittances play in supporting families, stabilizing countries during emergencies, and providing the vital capital needed for developing economies". The positive contributions migrants within South Africa bring to the local society and economy, in terms of cultural diversity, skills, economic growth, etc., should not be overlooked.

The current WCC programme on global migration builds on the Council's work of many years. In its Statement on Uprooted People, adopted in Geneva in Sept. 1995, the World Council of Churches central committee said: "Severe breakdown of economic and social conditions that once provided people with the means to survive in their traditional communities and in their own countries is accelerating the movement of people.

Nonetheless, the movement of people has been a permanent feature of human history. A dangerous rise in racist and xenophobic hostility is often expressed in violence against refugees and immigrants. They frequently become scapegoats for many social and economic tensions in society and targets for growing hatred.”

South Africa has a long history of fighting against racial discrimination and hatred. Its constitution contains a Bill of Rights which is a “cornerstone of democracy in South Africa” and compels the State to “respect, protect, promote and fulfill the rights in the Bill of Rights”. Thus we urge the South African government to demonstrate leadership by bringing to an end this murderous violence and promoting the observance of human rights and adherence to the standards and norms as contained in international human rights instruments. Furthermore, we call for the reinforcement of the human-rights-based legal framework in order to prevent and redress human rights violations against migrants and for the promotion of training on migrants’ rights and against xenophobia. We affirm the SACC general secretary Eddie Makue in believing that, “South Africa can and should do more to promote security, political stability and broad-based economic development in the region, as well as to ensure a more equitable sharing of resources and delivery of services in the nation.”

We acknowledge the right of nations to maintain the sanctity and security of their borders. At the same time our faith compels us to appeal to your compassion to welcome the stranger as we find written in our gospel –“I was a stranger and you took me into your home. When I was hungry, you gave me food, when thirsty, you gave me drink...” (Matthews 25: 35-36). The World Council of Churches asks no less of the churches, the government and the peoples of South Africa toward those who are seeking shelter among you. “In Christ there is no East or West, In Him no South or North; But one great fellowship of love throughout the whole wide Earth.” Let these words find meaningful and concrete expression in your ministry and relationships with the brothers and sisters who have come to South Africa in search of security and better opportunities for a more abundant life.

Yours in Christ,
Rev. Dr Samuel Kobia
General secretary

- **Letter from WCC general secretary to Dr Nelson Mandela, congratulating him on the occasion of his 90th birthday, 18 July 2008**

Dear Madiba,
Dear brother in the struggle for liberation and justice!

It was amazing to see you celebrating your birthday together with more than 50,000 people from all walks of life in London Hyde Park a couple of weeks ago. I was impressed not so much by the stars who lined up to sing and perform for you, but by the

many young people who cheered and were encouraged by your presence, and by your wise words “it is now in your hands”. This gives hope to all of us that there will be real freedom for all!

Who else has represented this hope as much as you in recent decades? Who else has been as clear and outspoken as you have when failure in leadership had to be named as such wherever and whenever a leader did not protect and care for the people, their dignity and their right to life. I will always remember your speech at WCC’s Jubilee Assembly in 1998 in Harare. You did not mince your words but you shared your concern about the deteriorating situation in Zimbabwe then, just as you did recently concerning the prevailing tragic situation there.

In the same speech, you rightly reminded us that we were united in the struggle for change in South Africa, but that the ideals and values of justice and freedom “must be our guide in the unfinished journey that we have traveled together”. We learned so much during that struggle about the cost of dignity, and these lessons accompany us as we confront other injustices in other regions, in the Middle East, in Africa, and elsewhere. We give thanks to God for your life. We pray that you may enjoy many more years of wisdom and hope, breathing the air of freedom to the full, and continuing to inspire all of us, young and old alike, who continue to believe that miracles are possible and that we can, together, make a better world.

Happy birthday, and may God richly and specially bless you this day and always!

With the highest esteem,
Yours,

Samuel Kobia
General secretary
World Council of Churches

Sudan

- **Minute on Darfur adopted by WCC executive committee, Etchmiadzin, Armenia, 25-28 September 2007**

1. During the 9th Assembly, the World Council of Churches affirmed the emerging international norm known as the ‘responsibility to protect’. The Assembly, in its “Vulnerable Populations at Risk: Statement on the Responsibility to Protect”, gives international church support to a new standard of protection for civilians when a state cannot or will not protect them.

2. “It is in those who are most vulnerable that Christ become visible for us,” the Assembly said, “The responsibility to protect the vulnerable reaches far beyond the

boundaries of nations and faith-traditions. It is an ecumenical responsibility, conceiving the world as one household of God....”

3. The responsibility to protect has three pillars: the prevention of catastrophic violence against civilians, the need to react if such violence occurs, and assistance in rebuilding and reconciliation afterwards. The norm defines state sovereignty in terms of duties and obligations for the well being of civilians rather than as an absolute power. It limits, but does not exclude, the use of force in protective interventions for humanitarian purposes.

4. Meeting in the country of Armenia, where genocide nearly a century ago still casts a deep shadow, we reiterate the international responsibility to protect people at risk in the Darfur region of Sudan and in neighbouring Chad. Important protective measures there have largely failed so far. Broader multilateral action is authorized but implementation is slow. Therefore:

A. We call member churches once again to bring the protection of people in Darfur to the attention of their governments, making use of the WCC 9th Assembly policy on the ‘responsibility to protect’. Noting that UN Security Council Resolution 1706 on Darfur is the first time the Security Council has referred to the responsibility to protect in a specific country crisis, we recommend that churches request their governments to pay special attention to its implementation.

B. We reiterate the executive committee’s request (‘Statement on Sudan’, May, 2006) that ecumenical delegations make fact-finding and solidarity visits to the region including Darfur. Member churches are also encouraged to provide humanitarian aid to Darfur through ACT International and to hold its people in their prayers.

- **Ecumenical solidarity visit to Sudan, 26 March-2 April 2008**

Sudanese churches face "tremendous tasks and challenges"

Amid ongoing fighting and humanitarian crises in several regions of Sudan, and risks of failure in implementing the 2005 peace agreement that ended two decades of civil war between north and south, the Sudanese people and churches face "tremendous tasks and challenges", an international ecumenical team of church representatives was told at the beginning of an eight-day solidarity visit to the country.

Representatives of the Sudan Council of Churches (SCC) met the delegation led by the World Council of Churches (WCC) General Secretary Rev. Dr Samuel Kobia in Khartoum on Wednesday 26 March. The group visiting the capital is one of four teams travelling to different regions, including Darfur, Rumbek and Yambio (see participants list below). All of them will join Sudanese church leaders, women and youth for a three-day conference in Juba on Monday 31 March.

Taking place nearly half-way through the interim period established by the 2005 Comprehensive Peace Agreement, the ecumenical visit "comes at the right time in the history of Sudan", said the SCC's statement welcoming the delegation.

"We are grateful for the moral support of the ecumenical family which helped us to stand the slaughter and trauma during the war", said Bishop Rudolph Deng Majak, chairman of the SCC board of trustees and president of the Sudan Catholic Bishops' Conference.

The 2005 Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) has ended the war between north and south and established a government of national unity. According to the SCC statement, it "provides the basis for a just and sustainable peace" in the country. However, its full implementation remains one of the biggest concerns of the Sudanese churches.

The Rev. Musa Kodi Jura of the Sudanese Church of Christ, chair of the SCC executive committee, explained that several indicators, including lack of transparency in the work of some commissions established by the agreement as well as in the sharing of oil revenues, point to a "slow implementation and possible derailing of the agreement". In addition, he added that "there is a lack of understanding of the CPA at the grassroots".

Among the armed conflicts and humanitarian crises weighing down the country, the one ravaging the Darfur region has a prominent place. Armed conflict there is "a tragedy in itself", but also a threat to the CPA implementation, the SCC statement says. Without solving all such conflicts, "there will be no just peace for anybody".

Even where the arms have been silenced, the "peace dividends" are "yet to be seen". Lack of health facilities, schools and clean water are among the most pressing issues. Among those particularly affected are the "returnees", people internally displaced by the war, sometimes for many years, who are now coming back to their former home regions.

"The conditions in the areas of resettlement can be quite horrible, to the extent that some of the returnees are considering going back where they had been displaced", said Rev. Peter Tibi of the Africa Inland Church, the SCC's general secretary.

The SCC statement recognizes the churches' "lack of capacity in many places" to fulfil their "manifold tasks". It also acknowledges the fact that churches are not immune to the problems of tribalism that affect the country.

WCC general secretary Samuel Kobia encouraged the churches to think of an "ecumenical strategic plan to contribute to rebuilding the country". Civic education on the Comprehensive Peace Agreement could be part of it, as churches play a "very important role in that regard" and make of it a "major process of mobilization", Kobia suggested.

Participants in the 26 March – 2 April ecumenical solidarity visit to Sudan, by region visited:

Khartoum

- Rev. Dr Samuel Kobia, WCC general secretary

- Rev. Dr Simon Dossou, WCC president from Africa; Presiding Bishop of the Protestant Methodist Church in Benin
- Rev. Dr William J. Shaw, president, National Baptist Convention USA, Inc.
- Ms Marina Peter, senior advocacy officer, Sudan Focal Point Europe, Germany

Darfur

- Rev. Fred Nyabera, executive director, Fellowship of Christian Councils and Churches in the Great Lakes and Horn of Africa (FECCLAHA)
- Mr Harold Miller, country representative in Sudan (1999-2005), Mennonite central committee, USA
- Ms Christina Papazoglou, WCC programme executive for human rights
- Mr Fredrick Nzwili, journalist, Ecumenical News International

Rumbek

- Rt Rev. Pie Ntukamazina, Province of the Anglican Church of Burundi
- Dr Agnes Abuom, WCC central and executive committees member; Anglican Church of Kenya
- Rev Fr Dr Pius Rutechura, general secretary, Association of Member Episcopal Conferences of Eastern Africa (AMECEA) and Tanzania Episcopal Conference, Roman Catholic Church
- Ms Omega Bula, executive minister, Justice Global and Ecumenical Relations Unit, United Church of Canada
- Ms **Leanne** Larmondin, editor, Anglican Journal, Canada

Yambio

- Metropolitan Dr Zacharias Mar Theophilus, Mar Thoma Syrian Church of Malabar, India
- Dr Gerrit Noltensmeier, special representative for Sudan, Council member, Evangelical Church in Germany (EKD)
- Bishop Gertrude Aopesyaga Kapuma, vice-president, All Africa Conference of Churches (AACC); honorary president, Religions for Peace; Church of Central Africa Presbyterian, Malawi
- Sister Catherine Okari, executive secretary, African Association of major superiors; Roman Catholic Church, Kenya
- Dr Manoj Kurian, WCC programme executive for health and healing

Sudan: churches at a crossroad

Sudanese churches stand at a crossroads, said the World Council of Churches (WCC) General Secretary Rev. Dr Samuel Kobia. On the one hand, they face a transition from liberation fight to rebuilding their homes and communities. On the other, they live in a country where Islam and Christianity cross paths and the relationship between the two is vital.

Speaking 3 April, at the closing session of a 3-day Congress of Sudanese Churches leaders in Juba, capital city of southern Sudan, Kobia addressed the historical

significance of the country and assessed the post-war role of its churches. The Juba conference, which included women and youth participation, culminated an international ecumenical solidarity visit to the country that took place from 26 March to 3 April.

From a historical point of view, Sudan, the biggest country in the continent, is a place where Islam meets Christianity, as well as where the Arab meets black Africans, Kobia said.

The majority of the estimated 39 million people of Sudan are Muslim, with Christians amounting to about 17%, and some 10% of followers of African traditional religions. While the northern part of the country is predominantly Muslim, the southern part is predominantly Christian.

A devastating 21-year civil war between the north and south of Sudan left 2 million Sudanese dead and another 4 million displaced persons, mostly in southern Sudan.

The war ended in January 2005 with the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA). The CPA established a government of national unity between north and south, with its seat in Khartoum, and in the south an autonomous government of the Sudan People's Liberation Movement.

In this context, the need for deepened interreligious dialogue was emphasized early in the ecumenical visit when Kobia and other international ecumenical representatives met with the Sudan Interreligious Council in Khartoum.

Speaking of the widely known letter 'A Common Word' which was sent by 138 Muslim leaders in October 2007, to Christian leaders around the world, Kobia said an "extraordinary opportunity to renew the Muslim-Christian dialogue" exists. The WCC is encouraging its member churches to "reflect on it (the letter) and to engage in dialogue with the Muslim community", he added.

War, peace and the changing role of the churches

"The CPA holds Sudan together", said Kobia. But with significant challenges facing the success of the agreement it is the civil society and especially the churches which are being called to play a crucial role in rebuilding southern Sudan.

According to Kobia, they need to adjust their role in line with the transition from liberation to nation building, both with very different ethos. Monitoring of the CPA implementation, civic education to enable citizen's participation, reconciliation and healing of the deep wounds and bitterness left by the war are among the areas where churches can make a significant contribution.

Collaboration between ecumenical partners remains crucial. But the churches in the country need to "earn the confidence and trust of the ecumenical family", showing that "they have what it takes to accomplish the tasks ahead", said Kobia. According to him, the Sudanese churches "have quite a way to go in this respect".

Organized by the All Africa Conference of Churches (AACC) and the World Council of Churches (WCC), the international ecumenical solidarity visit was hosted by the Sudan Council of Churches (SCC). Led by the WCC general secretary, four teams of church representatives visited Khartoum, Yambio, Rumbek and Darfur.

Southern Sudanese President Salva Kiir reaffirms willingness to work "side by side" with churches

"We remain committed to work side by side with the churches", the President of Southern Sudan Salva Kiir Mayardit told representatives of an international ecumenical delegation in Juba, Southern Sudan, on 3 April 2008.

"As the Sudan People's Liberation Movement (SLPM) has always stood for the people, we have no problems with the churches", said Kiir, speaking at a meeting with a small group of representatives from an ecumenical delegation led by the World Council of Churches (WCC) General Secretary Rev. Dr Samuel Kobia. "But our churches are very poor", Kiir added, "so they need the support of the international ecumenical family".

The meeting took place at the end of an eight-day solidarity visit to Sudan organized by the WCC and the All Africa Conference of Churches (AACC) and hosted by the Sudan Council of Churches (SCC). From 26 March to 2 April, a group of international ecumenical representatives split in four teams to visit Khartoum, Darfur, Yambio and Rumbek. The visit ended in Juba, capital of Southern Sudan, where the visitors joined some 50 Sudanese church representatives – leaders, women and youth – for a three-day conference.

"Participants in this visit have come from all over the world", Kobia briefed President Kiir, "to listen and to see what Sudan is going through at this time". This shows "how much the constituencies of the WCC and the AACC are committed to journey with the people of Sudan through the Sudanese churches and the SCC". Among other things, the visitors and local church leaders explored how the capacity of the churches may be developed to contribute to building peace and reconciliation in the country.

President Kiir shared his views on the difficulties faced in the implementation of the 2005 Comprehensive Peace Agreement that ended the devastating 21-year war between the predominantly Muslim north and the majority Christian south. By virtue of that agreement, Kiir is both the first vice-president of the government of national unity headed by President Omar El Bashir and the president of the autonomous government of Southern Sudan.

The previous day, the Minister for Regional Cooperation Barnaba Marial Benjamin took part in the final session of the Juba conference and briefed participants about the government's views on a range of political, social and economic issues. "We are happy that the churches are alive and kicking", he said. "We have not forgotten the role played by the churches and the ecumenical community during the war", added Marial Benjamin.

In Khartoum, a delegation led by Kobia met the minister of Guidance and Endowment Hassan El Tighani, whose office deals with Muslim and Christian affairs. The visitors thanked the minister for the help regularly provided on many issues and raised a number of concerns regarding some difficulties faced by Christians in the part of the country under the Khartoum government. The minister briefed the ecumenical representatives about the actions taken by his office. "Our focus is tolerance, coexistence and unity", El Tighani said.

Participants at the international ecumenical visit also met the director for Gender and Child Welfare Regina Ossa Lullo, and the acting director for Religious Affairs Moses Telar Cindul, both from the Government of Southern Sudan.

Sudanese youth and women identify challenges in a war-torn country

Based on a candid assessment of how two decades of war have affected them, Sudanese youth told church leaders what they need most: skills training, jobs and means of participating in shaping their country's future. Sudanese women, in turn, spoke out about their vulnerability, increased by war and cultural patterns.

In Sudan, youth have been treated "as passive objects rather than participants in shaping the society", affirmed a statement by some 30 Sudanese young Christians gathered in Juba, capital of Southern Sudan, for a three-day conference of church leaders, women and youth. The conference concluded an international ecumenical solidarity visit to the country that took place from 26 March to 2 April.

While the Sudanese young Christians believe that youth have a "crucial role" in "conflict resolution, peace building and sustainable development", reality shows that many are "hijacked by politicians who want to achieve their goals through wars and bloody conflicts", making of them "victims and perpetrators of violence".

The culture of war, high levels of illiteracy and poverty, lack of job and training opportunities as well as tribalism and vulnerability to HIV and AIDS are among the challenges faced by Sudanese youth.

For youth to participate in nation building, they need educational centres where they may acquire "technical and educational skills" as well as capacities in regard to "HIV/AIDS, conflict transformation, human rights and democracy". Creating job opportunities for youth "should be a priority for the church and the government".

Churches have a specific role in enabling youth to contribute to implementing the 2005 Comprehensive Peace Agreement, as well as fostering healing and reconciliation. They also have to advocate for the rights of people living with HIV and AIDS.

Women's resources and experiences

The cost of the 21-year war between northern and southern Sudan has been high for women too, according to a report by some 30 women elaborated at the Juba conference.

That cost includes scattered families, gender-based violence, an increase in the number of widows with consequences of vulnerability to "dispossession of property and wife inheritance", forced marriages and increased polygamy. HIV and AIDS caused further stigmatization of women.

Among other proposals, the report submitted to the Sudanese church leaders recommends the promotion of "women's rights through gender awareness campaigns and training", to "break the silence around issues of sexuality, HIV and AIDS", to "invest in adult education for both women and men" and to "encourage Christian men (fathers) to be involved in the life of their families".

The church should "stop applying double-standard measures regarding moral issues and expectations especially when it comes to women and men", the women affirmed.

"Reconciliation, forgiveness and healing programmes" should continue to be highly ranked among churches' priorities, the women's report proposes, and churches should involve women in their implementation so as to take advantage of their resources and experiences.

Organized by the All Africa Conference of Churches (AACC) and the World Council of Churches (WCC), the international ecumenical solidarity visit was hosted by the Sudan Council of Churches (SCC). Led by the WCC General Secretary Rev. Dr Samuel Kobia, four teams of church representatives visited Khartoum, Yambio, Rumbek and Darfur.

"Ignored by the whole world" – a visit to Yambio, Sudan

Metropolitan Dr Zacharias Mar Theophilus, from the Mar Thoma Syrian Church of Malabar, India, was a member of an ecumenical team that recently visited Sudan's Yambio region. The capital city of West Equatoria state, close to the border with the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Yambio is green and fertile. "But the people we met there feel ignored," says Metropolitan Theophilus, "ignored by Khartoum, ignored by Juba, ignored by the whole world."

Khartoum and Juba, the capital cities of Northern and Southern Sudan respectively, are separated by some 1,700 kilometres and the wounds of 21 years of civil war. The conflict between the predominantly Muslim North and the majority Christian South killed some 2 million people and left more than 4 million internally displaced persons.

A Comprehensive Peace Agreement signed in January 2005 ended the war but not the problems. Not least being the implementation of the many contentious points of the agreement itself, like border demarcation, sharing of oil revenues and proper preparation of a census and elections.

A predominately agricultural area, Yambio was relatively less affected than other regions during the war. But there have been sporadic tensions between the local Zande population and displaced cattle keeping Dinka. An added plight is the presence in the region of the Ugandan Lord's Resistance Army. The rebel movement, whose leaders have been issued

with war crimes indictments by the International Criminal Court because of the atrocities committed during a 21-year war against the Ugandan government, is known for its cruelty.

A member of the ecumenical team said: "Yambio could be a paradise, but under the current circumstances is simply terrible."

The five-person team visiting Yambio was part of a bigger international ecumenical solidarity visit to Sudan sent by the World Council of Churches and the All Africa Council of Churches. From 26 to 31 April, in addition to Yambio, three other teams visited Khartoum, Darfur and Rumbek before joining some 80 Sudanese church representatives – leaders, women and youth – for a three-day conference in Juba. The goal of the visits and conference was to listen to the Sudanese churches' concerns and hopes as well as to express the ecumenical family's solidarity with the churches and people of Sudan.

- **Report of the study on genocide with regard to the Darfur crisis approved by the WCC executive committee, Lübeck, Germany, 23-26 September 2008**

1. At its meeting in Geneva, Switzerland (30 August-6 September 2006), the WCC central committee "requested the staff to study if the use of the term 'genocide' with regard to the crisis in Darfur is appropriate in light of the internationally agreed conventions on this issue, and to offer counsel to the churches."

2. Before proceeding with a close examination of the Darfur crisis and the response of the international community to it, there is need to examine the legal definition of the term 'genocide' and the particular challenges it poses.

Analysis of the term 'genocide'

3. The word genocide was used for the first time by lawyer, Raphael Lemkin, who combined the Greek word *genos* (race or tribe) with the Latin word *cide* (cidere – to massacre, kill). Following the horrors of the holocaust he campaigned to have genocide recognized as a crime under international law. His efforts gave way to the adoption of the "Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide", adopted by the UN General Assembly on 9 December 1948, coming into effect in January 1951. Article II of the convention offers a legal definition of the crime of genocide according to which genocide means any of the following acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group, as such: a) killing members of the group; b) causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group; c) deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part; d) imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group; e) forcibly transferring children of the group to another group. The Convention also imposes a general duty on states that are signatories to "prevent and

punish” genocide. The same definition was taken up later on by the statute of the two ad-hoc tribunals; e.g. the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda (Article 2) and the International Criminal Tribunal for ex-Yugoslavia (Article 4) and finally by the Rome statute of the International Criminal Court (Article 5).

4. Over the years the definition of genocide has been widely debated. Many have argued that it is too narrow and thus many of the mass killings perpetrated since the adoption of the convention would not fall under it. Some of the arguments invoked in support of this point are that the convention excludes targeted political and social groups. Furthermore, the definition is limited to direct acts against people and excludes acts against the environment which sustains them. Another issue is that proving intention beyond reasonable doubt is extremely difficult. An additional question along these lines is the difficulty of defining or measuring “in part” and establishing how many deaths equal genocide. One more dimension that should be taken into consideration is the reluctance of UN member states to single out other member states or intervene.

5. What differentiates genocide from other crimes against humanity is the intent to destroy in whole or in part a national, ethnic, racial or religious group. Acts which are directed against those groups with a discriminatory intent but not with intent to destroy them constitute crimes against humanity and not genocide. As becomes evident, there is a very fine line between those two categories which renders qualifying a certain crime as genocide a very difficult task.

6. In order to determine whether a particular crime constitutes genocide it needs to be ascertained whether a factual case has been made out of the legal pre-requisites. It requires the gathering of concrete evidence that can prove beyond reasonable doubt the commission of such a crime. The gathering of such evidence can prove to be a very difficult task especially during on-going crises, like in the case of Darfur.

Developments on international level with regard to the Darfur crisis

7. In January 2005 an International Commission of inquiry on Darfur, authorized by UN Security Council resolution 1564 of 2004, issued a report to the secretary general stating that, “the government of the Sudan has not pursued a policy of genocide”. Nevertheless, the Commission cautioned that, “this should not be taken in any way as detracting from the gravity of the crimes perpetrated in that region. International offences such as the crimes against humanity and war crimes that have been committed in Darfur may be no less serious and heinous than genocide”. Following that, the United Nations Security Council adopted resolution 1593 (31 March 2005) referring the ongoing conflict in Darfur to the International Criminal Court (ICC). Following this, in April 2007, the ICC issued its first arrest warrants in a three-year investigation of war crimes in Darfur, Sudan, naming Janjaweed militia leader, Ali Kushayb, and Sudanese humanitarian affairs minister Ahmad Muhammed Harun, who is believed to have been one of the masterminds behind the well-reported mass killings and displacements in the region. Since the prosecutor did not find sufficient evidence to prosecute for genocide, they are being accused of 51 crimes against humanity and war crimes. Meanwhile, the mandate of the

special rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Sudan has been extended for one year by the Human Rights Council during its 6th session in December 2007.

8. On 14 July 2008, ICC prosecutor, Luis Moreno-Ocampo, submitted to the judges of the pretrial chamber of the ICC an application for the issuance of an arrest warrant against Sudan's President Omar Hassan Ahmad Al Bashir, for genocide, crimes against humanity and war crimes.

9. Three years after the Security Council requested him to investigate in Darfur, and based on the evidence collected, the prosecutor has concluded there are reasonable grounds to believe that Sudan's President Al Bashir bears criminal responsibility in relation to ten counts of genocide, crimes against humanity and war crimes.

10. According to the prosecution evidence, President Al Bashir masterminded and implemented a plan to destroy in substantial part the Fur, Masalit and Zaghawa groups, on account of their ethnicity. *"Members of the three groups, historically influential in Darfur, were challenging the marginalization of the province; they engaged in a rebellion. Al Bashir failed to defeat the armed movements, so he went after the people. His motives were largely political. His alibi was a counterinsurgency. His intent was genocide"* the prosecutor said.

11. According to the evidence gathered, the prosecutor said that for over five years armed forces and the militia/Janjaweed, on President Al Bashir's orders, attacked and destroyed villages. They then pursued the survivors in the desert. Millions of civilians have been uprooted from lands they occupied for centuries, all their means of survival destroyed, their land spoiled and inhabited by new settlers. Those who reached the camps for the displaced people were subjected to conditions calculated to bring about their destruction (killings, rapes, hunger).

12. It should be noted that Sudan has not signed up to the ICC but the court has authority to act in this case because the UN Security Council gave it a mandate to do so, with resolution 1593 in March 2005. The Pre-Trial Chamber will now review and assess the evidence presented to them over the next couple of months. If the judges determine that there are reasonable grounds to believe that President Omar Al Bashir committed the alleged crimes, they will decide on the best manner to ensure his appearance in court. If the judges issue the warrant, Sudan will be obliged to arrest its own president, in effect the president handing himself over, which most likely will never happen.

13. Under Article 89, President Al Bashir might also be liable to arrest if he visits one of the 106 states that are parties to the treaty. Article 89 of the court's statute says that the court "may transit a request for the arrest and surrender of a person...to any state on the territory of which that person may be found..."

14. This is the first time that the ICC prosecutor has made charges against a sitting head of state, breaking new ground in the reduction of national sovereignty rights that have characterized international law in recent years. The real impact of this development is yet

to be seen. Meanwhile, on 31 July, the council renewed the UN African Union Mission (UNAMID) mandate for 12 months in resolution 1828. This was preceded by intense negotiations on a proposal, following a request to the ICC from its prosecutor for an arrest warrant against President Al Bashir, to include language suspending ICC proceedings under article 16 of the Rome Statute. According to this article “*No investigation or prosecution may be commenced or proceeded with under this statute for a period of 12 months after the security council, in a resolution adopted under chapter VII of the charter of the United Nations, has requested the court to that effect; that request may be renewed by the council under the same conditions.*” The majority resisted this proposal, but compromise was found in emphasizing the need to bring the perpetrators of serious crimes to justice (and the government’s obligations in this respect) and also mentioning some Council members’ concerns related to the request for an arrest warrant against President Al Bashir. The resolution took note of those members’ intention to consider these matters further.

15. Darfur will continue to be a focus for the UN Security Council in September. In particular Council members are expected to discuss issues relating to the deployment of the UNAMID and current proceedings before the International Criminal Court (ICC). It is unclear whether any formal proposals for a suspension of proceedings against Sudan’s President Omar Al Bashir before the ICC will emerge in September. A report from the sanctions panel of experts is due by 15 September.

16. It must be noted that divisions within the Council on ICC issues are expected to continue. China, Russia, South Africa, Libya, Burkina Faso and Indonesia support the suspension of ICC proceedings. Other Council members believe it is more important to safeguard legal mechanisms and to ensure accountability.

17. But recent developments on the ICC issue also seem to indicate that some of those members may be open to the possibility of an article 16 suspension of ICC proceedings for President Al Bashir. This would be provided there are serious steps from Khartoum in improving cooperation with the ICC, including credible action against other indictees, as well as real cooperation with UNAMID’s deployment, facilitating humanitarian assistance and creating genuine conditions for a peace process. (There also seems to be a perception that pressure may be required on the rebels in that regard.)

18. On the other hand the Sudanese government unveiled a reconciliation initiative for Darfur including a national dialogue conference, but as yet no dates have been officially announced. The government also appointed a prosecutor to head domestic proceedings on serious crimes in Darfur. But skepticism remains due to the timing, the lack of Sudanese legislation dealing with such crimes, and weaknesses in the Sudanese judiciary. The government reportedly continues to refuse to execute pending ICC arrest warrants for Ahmed Haroun and Ali Kushayb. Thus many seem unconvinced of Khartoum’s recent efforts on domestic mechanisms for justice and accountability, being mindful of past similar initiatives that they see as lacking credibility.

19. On Darfur, the key issue is whether there is anything the council can do to encourage the parties to move towards a genuine ceasefire and a peace process. Another is improving security and, in that context, determining how best to advance UNAMID's deployment.

20. Justice and accountability issues also seem likely to preoccupy members, in particular whether an appropriate balance can be found that preserves the integrity and independence of the ICC and avoids impunity, encourages Sudan's cooperation with UNAMID, improves the prospects of a ceasefire and peace process in Darfur and preserves overall stability in Sudan. In this regard, options could include:

- adopting a wait-and-see approach on the ICC's consideration of its prosecutor's request for an arrest warrant against President Al Bashir;
- reaching an understanding with Sudan that President Al Bashir's ICC proceedings could be suspended for one year provided that there is a watertight arrangement on Sudan's cooperation with the ICC over other indictees, improved cooperation with UNAMID, and concrete steps towards a ceasefire. (A necessary measure in this regard might be to consider a spectrum of sanctions against the rebels should they refuse to cease hostilities.); and
- some other watertight arrangement that would ensure legal accountability for ICC indictees, perhaps along the lines of the Lebanon tribunal (which applies domestic law but uses international judges and a neutral location—but a problem in this option is the absence of domestic legislation in Sudan incorporating the relevant international crimes).

21. If the option of domestic judicial mechanisms in substitution for the ICC is considered, important challenges would arise. In addition to issues relating to judicial capacity and independence, as already mentioned Sudan's legal system does not contain specific provisions for crimes against humanity, war crimes and genocide.

22. Still another issue is whether the Council should increase its focus on the broader challenges facing Sudan, in particular whether there is anything the council should do on the north-south situation. This includes how best to ensure progress in implementing the CPA on elections in 2009 and a southern independence referendum in 2011; demarcating the north-south border and the status of Abyei; and oil-revenue sharing.

Closing remarks

23. From the analysis that preceded, it becomes quite evident that genocide is a rather complex issue with not just legal but also political parameters. Genocide has legal implications, entailing full-scale intervention by the international community and therefore it cannot be treated lightly without due consideration and in-depth analysis of all different elements surrounding a given case.

24. The pursuit of justice, peace and reconciliation has been at the core of the mission of Christian churches as a response to the teaching of Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount: 'Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be

filled...Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called the children of God.'
(Mathew 5: 6-9)

25. The churches in different parts of the world, and especially in those countries which have suffered gross human rights violations, have been struggling against impunity at the national and international level. The rationale of this struggle has been not so much to seek punishment, but to overcome violence and impunity, to support victims and to pursue peace, justice and reconciliation.

26. In this work the paradigm of restorative justice has emerged as a way to stress the importance of restoring broken relationships within the communities. Through restorative justice, people begin to understand each other's vulnerability and acknowledge their humanity. Restorative justice means to restore victims, restore perpetrators and restore communities. A victim centered approach emerges as one of the characteristics of restorative justice procedures from the community level to the national level.

27. Churches and ecumenical organizations have always interpreted the cries of the victims as a demand to respect their rights. Victims have the right to know exactly what happened in the case of grave human rights violations. It was within this context that churches raised their prophetic voice with regard to the Armenian genocide. In 1984, WCC published a "Background Information" on "Armenia: the continuing tragedy". Following this, the Commission of the Churches on International Affairs raised the issue of the Armenian genocide in the United Nations Commission on Human Rights with reference to the latter's report of the question of Prevention and Punishment of Genocide. That 'Revised and Updated Report on the Question of the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide' was presented in 1985 to the UN Sub-Commission on Prevention of Discrimination and Protection of National Minorities, " and concluded that the Armenian massacres had constituted genocide.

28. Churches should once again assume their pioneering role and raise their prophetic voice with regard to the Darfur crisis. Following the WCC Ecumenical solidarity visit to Darfur and the latest developments on the international level, we believe that all the evidence are showing that the crimes committed in Darfur against non-combatant civilians fulfill the legal pre-requisites of the crime of Genocide as prescribed in the United Nations Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide and in the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court.

29. The conflict in Darfur enters its sixth year and constitutes a moral challenge for the international community that must no longer silence and ignore the continuous deteriorating situation of thousands of innocent people who are confronted daily with death, famine and are subjected to conditions calculated to bring about their physical destruction.

30. During the High-level Plenary Meeting of the United Nations General Assembly in 2005, world leaders agreed, for the first time, that states have a primary responsibility to protect their own populations and that the international community has a responsibility to

act when these governments fail to protect the most vulnerable. The responsibility to protect populations from genocide, ethnic cleansing, war crimes and crimes against humanity is an international commitment by governments to prevent and react to grave crises, wherever they may occur. This responsibility to prevent, react to and rebuild following such crises rests first and foremost with each individual state. However when states manifestly fail to protect their populations, the international community shares a collective responsibility to respond. This response should be the exercise of first peaceful, and then, if necessary, coercive, including forceful, steps to protect civilians.

31. The Responsibility to Protect means that no state can invoke its right to sovereignty as an excuse to avoid any kind of scrutiny from the international community while it conducts or permits widespread human rights violations to its population. Nor can states turn a blind eye either because these violations extend beyond their borders, or because proactive actions might not suit their narrowly-defined national interests. Unfortunately this has been the case with the Darfur crisis. The international community does no longer have the right to remain a bystander and allow the perpetration of high scale atrocities, like the ones occurring in Darfur, continue unpunished.

32. As it was stated in the Report on the Armenian Genocide, adopted by the WCC central committee, Geneva, 15-22 February, 2005 *“From the Christian perspective, the path towards justice and reconciliation requires the recognition of the crime committed as a sine qua non condition for the healing of memories and the possibility of forgiveness. Forgiveness does not mean forgetting but to look back with the intention to restore justice, the respect for human rights and relationships between perpetrators and victims.”*

33. Churches should take the lead in advocating and offering their support to all efforts, national and international, that aim at pursuing justice and accountability with a view to building a long-lasting peace through a truly reconciliatory process.

- **Letter to Lieutenant-General Omar Hassan Ahmad al-Bashir, president of the Republic of Sudan, on the discontinuation of humanitarian aid services, 11 March 2009**

Your Excellency:

We write to implore you to think carefully about the discontinuation of humanitarian aid services to your people. The worldwide ecumenical family is sincerely troubled by the images of severe human need we see displayed on our television screens. We urge careful review of your current policies for the sake of the children and families who ultimately are the ones who suffer.

There are still varying opinions as to how to move forward given current events. There are reports that some aid agencies may not function in the best interest of the people of

Sudan, but that is most assuredly the minority of the agencies. Many humanitarian agencies have good heartfelt intentions and want to alleviate pain, suffering and neglect.

How the world addresses the situation in Sudan, is the subject of much debate. As people of faith we always want to prevent violence. We want to react to situations of compelling human need with appropriate measures and to work toward the rebuilding of good will and reconciliation. We want this for the people of Sudan.

We pray, and ask the international community to remember, not only the people of Sudan but also the surrounding nations who have taken in many of the displaced persons from your country. We pray for continued strength during these times of stress.

We must take all the information coming to us into consideration as we proceed. For instance, because children and women are among the first to suffer if world governments and NGO's are not permitted to assist, the World Council of Churches will remain firm in the call for continued humanitarian aid to meet the needs of the "least of these" (Matthew 25). This is our biblical mandate. The World Council of Churches remains resolute in its call to protect the population against increased and continued deprivation in so much as it depends on us all.

Again, please allow humanitarian aid workers to fulfill the need for food, water, medicine and other life sustaining measures. We pray that you seriously consider this request.

Yours sincerely,
Rev. Dr Samuel Kobia
General secretary

- **Letter from WCC general secretary to member churches in Sudan, the Sudan Council of Churches and REOs in the area regarding crimes committed in Darfur, 9 October 2008**

Dear Friends,

This letter is to inform you regarding one of the actions taken by the WCC executive committee at its meeting in Lübeck, Germany, 23- 26 September 2008. The executive committee discussed two documents on the situation in Darfur. The first was a report on the 25 March – 3 April 2008 Ecumenical Visit to Darfur as well as an item entitled "The Study on Genocide with regard to the Darfur Crisis". Copies of both documents are included with this letter.

By way of background information, at its meeting in Geneva, Switzerland (30 August – 6 September 2006), the WCC central committee "requested the staff to study if the use of the term 'genocide' with regard to the crisis in Darfur is appropriate in light of the internationally agreed conventions on this issue, and to offer counsel to the churches". It

is in implementing this request that the document on “The Study on Genocide with regard to the Darfur Crisis” was carried out and presented to the executive committee in Lübeck. The executive committee received the document and its main finding that “we believe that all the evidence is showing that the crimes committed in Darfur against non-combatant civilians fulfil the legal pre-requisites of the crime of Genocide as prescribed in the United Nations Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide and in the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court”.

With this letter I particularly alert you to the conclusion of the ‘Study’ document, being the basis on which the executive committee has decided on the next steps. The executive committee suggests that the WCC move forward with a call of genocide for what is happening in Darfur. The definitive action on this call would not be taken until the next meeting of the central committee in September 2009. In the intervening period of one year, we would like to engage the WCC member churches, REOs – especially AACC, ecumenical partners and Specialized Ministries in discussing this critical issue. We welcome your feedback.

As you read the document, you will see that the executive committee found support in previous actions by the central committee on calling for genocide with respect to the situation in Armenia.

Report on the Armenian Genocide, adopted by the WCC central committee, Geneva, 15-22 February, 2005 ‘From the Christian perspective, the path towards justice and reconciliation requires the recognition of the crime committed as a sine qua non condition for the healing of memories and the possibility of forgiveness. Forgiveness does not mean forgetting but to look back with the intention to restore justice, the respect for human rights and relationships between perpetrators and victims.’

We look forward to hearing from you regarding this information and to working with all of our member churches to do whatever we can to contribute to durable solutions to the crises in the region. Please know that our prayers are with you, the churches of Sudan and through all of Africa.

Sincerely,
Rev. Dr Samuel Kobia
General secretary

- **Statement on the Darfur crisis in the context of Sudan adopted by the WCC central committee, Geneva, Switzerland, 26 August–2 September 2009**

1. Since early 2003, the conflict in Darfur has unleashed an overwhelming wave of violence resulting in the death of hundreds of thousands of civilians and in an

immense humanitarian crisis with millions of innocent people being displaced and subjected to vile crimes (torture, rape, abductions). The conflict enters its sixth year and constitutes a moral challenge for the international community that must no longer silence and ignore the continuous deteriorating situation of thousands of innocent people who are confronted daily with death and famine and are subjected to conditions calculated to bring about their physical destruction.

2. The pursuit of justice, peace and reconciliation has been at the core of the mission of Christian churches as a response to the teaching of Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount: “Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled. Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called the children of God” (Matthew 5: 6-9). The churches in different parts of the world, and especially in those countries which have suffered gross human rights violations, have been struggling against impunity at the national and international level. The rationale of this struggle has been not so much to seek punishment, but to overcome violence and impunity, to support victims and to pursue peace, justice and reconciliation.
3. Churches and ecumenical organizations have always interpreted the cries of the victims as a demand to respect their rights. Victims have the right to know exactly what happened in the case of grave human rights violations. It was within this context that churches raised their prophetic voice with regard to the Armenian genocide. As it was stated in the “Report on the Armenian Genocide”, adopted by the WCC central committee, Geneva, 15 – 22 February 2005: “From the Christian perspective, the path towards justice and reconciliation requires the recognition of the crime committed as a sine qua non condition for the healing of memories and the possibility of forgiveness. Forgiveness does not mean forgetting but to look back with the intention to restore justice, the respect for human rights and relationships between perpetrators and victims.”
4. Churches should once again assume their pioneering role and raise their prophetic voice with regard to the Darfur crisis. The crimes committed in Darfur against innocent civilians amount to the crime of genocide as prescribed in the United Nations (UN) Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide and in the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court (ICC).
5. States have a primary responsibility to protect their populations from genocide, ethnic cleansing, war crimes and crimes against humanity. However, when states manifestly fail to protect their populations, the international community shares a collective responsibility to respond. The international community no longer has the right to remain a bystander and allow the perpetration of large scale atrocities, like the ones occurring in Darfur, to continue unpunished.
6. Unfortunately the government of Sudan has failed to protect its population. Furthermore, following the arrest warrant issued by the ICC against the president of the Republic of Sudan, Omar Hassan Ahmed Al Bashir, the Sudanese government proceeded in the expulsion of a number of humanitarian aid organizations from

Darfur who were providing life sustaining assistance to millions of people in the region.

7. At the same time, the lack of progress in the peace negotiations causes further concerns for the future of this war torn region and the livelihood of its people. It also has an impact on the already fragile Comprehensive Peace Agreement, signed between the government of Sudan and the Sudan People's Liberation Movement/Army in 2005, which brought to an end a 21 year conflict in the largest country of the African continent. The conflict in Darfur is undoubtedly rather complex and its interconnectedness with other parts of Sudan and ongoing conflicts in neighbouring countries, as well as its destabilizing effects for the whole region should not be underestimated, especially in view of the forthcoming elections in Sudan in 2010 and the country's critical 2011 referendum on a possible secession of the South from Sudan.

Acknowledging the seriousness of the Darfur conflict and its impact on peace and stability in Sudan as expressed in the All Africa Council of Churches general committee "Statement on the situation in Sudan" issued on 24 – 27 March 2009, the central committee of the WCC, meeting in Geneva, Switzerland, 26 August – 2 September 2009:

- A. **Condemns** the mass atrocities committed against innocent civilians in Darfur.
- B. **Affirms** its commitment and support to all national and international efforts aiming at pursuing justice and accountability with a view to building a long lasting peace through a truly reconciliatory process which will allow people to resettle and reintegrate in their communities from which they were forcefully displaced.
- C. **Urges** the government of Sudan to assume full responsibility for the protection of its citizens irrespective of their ethnic, religious or political affiliation, and further calls on all parties in the Darfur conflict to restrain from all forms of violence and to uphold respect for the dignity and human rights of all people in the region.
- D. **Calls upon** the government of Sudan to allow uninterrupted humanitarian assistance to reach all suffering people in Darfur and **calls upon** the international community to provide the necessary resources.
- E. **Appeals** to the government of Sudan to actively show its commitment to justice and peace by honouring the statements and agreements it has signed, especially the Comprehensive Peace Agreement.
- F. **Urges** African nations and the international community, both individually as well as through organizations such as the African Union, the Arab League and the United Nations, to continue to support the peace process through constructive dialogue with all parties involved in the conflict.
- G. **Appreciates** the assistance provided by the peace keeping force UNAMID (African Union-United Nations Hybrid Operation in Darfur) and calls for further financial and logistical support by the international community in order to allow UNAMID to protect the civilian population most effectively.

- H. *Acknowledges* the significant role of the churches in Sudan in promoting interreligious dialogue and advocating for peace, justice, reconciliation and respect for the dignity and well being of all the people of Sudan.
- I. *Encourages* all Christians to pray for an end to the hostilities in Darfur and for a lasting peace in Sudan.

Tanzania

- **WCC delegation visit to Tanzania, 1-3 July 2007**

"Today, in order to fight poverty, Africa needs to mobilize similar efforts to those rallied against colonialism," World Council of Churches (WCC) General Secretary Rev. Dr Samuel Kobia told Tanzanian church leaders.

Kobia met leaders of Tanzanian churches during a 1-3 July visit to the country, which brought him to the capital Dar es Salaam and to Arusha. He praised the churches advocacy work in the area of debt relief for poor countries as well as their efforts in fighting corruption.

"Tanzanian churches have much to offer to other African countries given their experience in overcoming the problem of ethnicity and tribal rivalry, as well as in dealing with interreligious issues, notably through the Christian-Muslim Commission for Peace, Development and Conflict Resolution," Kobia told the church leaders. Tanzania's population of near 40 million is made up of more than 120 tribes. Christianity and Islam are the two main religions.

In Arusha, Kobia visited the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda (ICTR), where he was briefed about the work both already accomplished and remaining ahead. Created by the UN Security Council in November 1994, the ICTR was established for the prosecution of persons responsible for genocide and other serious violations of international humanitarian law committed in Rwanda in 1994.

For the visit to the ICTR, the WCC general secretary was joined by two Rwandese church leaders: Bishop Onesphore Rwaje, president of the Protestant Council of Rwanda, and Abbé Vincent Gasana from the Roman Catholic Church.

Also in Arusha, Kobia visited the headquarters of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania (ELCT). The church top leadership informed the WCC general secretary about the church's mission, development and HIV/AIDS work.

During the continuation of the visit, the WCC general secretary was accompanied by WCC central committee member Rev. Dr Elisée Musemakweli and Dr Rogate Mshana, WCC programme executive for Economic Justice, Poverty and Ecology.

In addition to the ELCT, other WCC member churches with headquarters in Tanzania are the Anglican Church of Tanzania and the Moravian Church in Tanzania.

Uganda

- **Synthesized report of “Living letters” ecumenical team visit to Uganda, 27 October-2 November 2008**

The Living Letters participants witnessed some of the consequences of the past and current violence that continues to affect Uganda today. They spoke with women, children and leaders both in church and government level.

Church response

One of the encouraging witnesses was to see the churches', civil societies and religious groups' response to overcome violence in Uganda and promote peace. For example, Bishop Nelson Onono Onweng of the Anglican church of Uganda in the churches efforts to rebuild and reconcile the country started by addressing 4 points: to work for the renewal of faith of the people in this region affected by the war; to work for peace and reconciliation, by carrying advocacy on his own, by taking his own initiative to contact the rebels and dialogue with them – he managed to meet Joseph Kony in DRC, and was actively involved in the Peace Talks; to reduce poverty, not through relief programs, but rather by giving a small piece of land to needy people in order to help them manage their own life and get a meaning in life – the education of children (as a means of reducing poverty) is crucial in order to form the future leaders of the country; and to build institutional capacity of the church itself, in order to be able to respond as a church.

From an inter-faith perspective, the bishop explained that Christian and Muslim leaders decided to work together in order to find peaceful solutions for the situation in Northern Uganda. In 1997, they formed the Acholi Religious Leaders Peace Initiative (ARLPI). The ARLPI is quite a powerful organ when it comes to its response to the problems generated by the conflict. It works hand in hand with religious leaders, cultural institutions, local political leaders and other key players. At one point, religious leaders went to sleep during 4 nights in the streets of Gulu to show solidarity with the “night commuters”, i.e. children who seek safety in shelters and protect themselves from rebel attacks and abductions. This is a great lesson of a people working together in solidarity with those in need.

Living Letters visited various internally displaced persons. They found similar challenges from place to place. One case example was among the Internally Displaced People in Teso. Some of the challenges are outlined below

Resettlement: People want to go back to their homes. They require resettlement packages-seeds, implements, household items. They require infrastructure and social

services including schools, roads, health facilities, and water. They also require psychosocial support.

Education: There is need for special support to the girl child education. The education of the girl-child has been badly affected by camp life. Early pregnancy has denied many girls the chance to pursue education. Boarding primary schools would be a good contribution in furthering the cause of girl-child education.

Health and HIV/AIDS: There are many people living with HIV/AIDS. Well over 19% of the population is living with HIV/AIDS. There is therefore great need for Voluntary Testing and Counselling (VTC) Anti-retroviral drugs (ARVs).

Water: There are some boreholes in the camps and in trading centres. Boreholes in villages have broken down. Therefore, there is need for more boreholes.

Psychological Support: Many people-women, children and men- are traumatized. Some people who have returned to their villages claimed they have been tormented by ghosts, hence they need counselling/social support networks.

Security: Attacks by Karimojong cattle rustlers have decreased. However, there are few incursions involving the theft of a few cows. Therefore the people of Teso still feel insecure. The Churches are addressing this problem. There is ongoing dialogue between the Karimojong and the Iteso. Karimojong warriors are said to be willing to give up their guns, but the Church does not have the means to help them settle down after abandoning the life of a warrior. Therefore there is need for financial and other forms of assistance to support the ongoing community dialogue peace process.

Lobby: Religious leaders and NGOs operating in Teso are overwhelmed by the demand for services and humanitarian support. They need support to continue to lobby and advocate for further assistance and to engage government on service provision-through programmes as the peace, Recovery and Development Plan for Northern Uganda- (PRDP) as well as security matters. They need to lobby for forgiveness and reconciliation, leading to long lasting peace.

International Ecumenical Peace Convocation (IEPC)

As living Letters witnessed, the church and other religious groups continue to support the people through counselling, peace building initiative and other reconciliatory activities. This builds hope among the people. However, many suffer from abject poverty. Domestic violence which mainly affects women still exists to a high level. Unemployment especially among the youth is still high. All these challenges plus the many others as illustrated above, continue to affect majority of Ugandans. While the church gives hope to people, there is need for proactive strategies to ensure that government not only in Uganda performs its functions to provide the people with all the necessary needs, among others food, education, water and jobs. The IEPC provides the churches with an opportunity to learn from one another identify some strategies to voice these challenges on behalf of the people and call upon governments to address them.

- **Letter to President Yoweri Kaguta Museveni, Republic of Uganda raising concerns regarding the Anti-Homosexual Bill, 2009, 22 December 2009**

Your Excellency,

I use this opportunity to reminiscence on how Ugandan society under your leadership has successfully dealt with difficult issues in the past. Reflecting back on churches involvement in issues regarding HIV and AIDS, I remember that in the very first years of the pandemic, people with AIDS were shunned by their families and their communities. It is with pride that I remember that church affiliated hospitals in Uganda and in New York admitted HIV positive people and cared for them, and stood by them and their grieving families to the end, while secular hospitals often denied admission to people with AIDS.

Uganda has been for long leading the world in trying to reduce HIV transmission and uproot stigma and discrimination of HIV positive people. In this quest, your country has produced some of the finest leaders in the field of HIV, to inspire millions of people around the globe. The key to this success has been the forthright acknowledgement of HIV and the mobilization of society to overcome HIV. It was with frankness and ingenuity that Ugandans dealt with the vulnerabilities of individuals and communities and hence been successful in stemming the spread of the disease. This has been a model to the world.

It is in the light of the above observations that we are saddened and distressed to receive the news from Uganda regarding a proposed law against homosexual individuals. But we are encouraged by the deep reservation of Churches and many members of Ugandan society, to this severe bill, which also proposes the death penalty to be meted to homosexual individuals who are HIV positive. We are in solidarity with their serious concerns that were raised regarding this bill that was presented to the Ugandan parliament on the 14th of October. My message to you is also a reflection of the genuine concern that has been expressed by sister churches and communities from across the world.

Deeply reflecting upon and discussing the proposed bill, I would like to share four thoughts with you, for your consideration:

1. Lord Jesus summarized the Ten Commandments in the two cardinal teachings – *Love God with all your being and to love ones neighbour as oneself*. According to Jesus Christ, all law and commandments were created to teach us to LOVE. Under conditions of human sin, law must provide a framework to protect the vulnerable and limit the misuse of power of individuals and groups in society. It should definitely not promote hatred.
2. All the discussions, time, efforts and sometimes money, used on the issue of homosexuality distracts us from non-judgmental and constructive discussions about the majority's problems; broken families, unfaithfulness, abuse of women

and children, too early sexual debut, cultural practices facilitating the transmission of HIV, unwanted pregnancies, HIV and other sexually transmitted infections. As a pastor I know how deep those problems are and which magnitude they take. It is my sincere wish that we redouble our efforts to engage in serious and constructive ways with all those issues.

3. From the experience of many nations, it is very clear that if such a bill is enacted into law, it will leave a lot of room for manipulation, abuse, black mail and oppression of people.
4. The bill itself, as per legal experts both in Uganda and abroad is seen as having serious and fundamental legal flaws.

It is my hope and my prayer that you will join the African church leaders and fellow people of faith, to abstain from supporting any law which can lead to a death penalty; promotes prejudice and hatred; and which can be easily manipulated to oppress people. It is my hope and prayer that the trust in our African experience in HIV will be restored. I am confident, that you, Your Excellency the President, will contribute to this by not letting this bill pass to become law.

May God bless your great nation! May the Lord shower you with blessings to govern Uganda in such a way that society will truly reflect the fruit of the Holy Spirit- *Love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, gentleness, faithfulness and self-control!* (Galatians 5:22)

Sincerely yours,
Rev. Dr Samuel Kobia
General secretary

cc Speaker of the Parliament Edward Ssekandi Kiwanuka

Zimbabwe

- **Letter to H.E. Mr Ban Ki-moon, UN secretary general, expressing concern about the current political crisis, 11 April 2008**

Your Excellency,

The World Council of Churches would like to add its voice to that of the international community expressed through your important remarks on the situation in Zimbabwe. We want to register our deep concern about the implications of the current political crisis which may be not only regional but also international.

It is my sincere hope that this critical situation will be addressed as a high priority of the international community until peace, justice and stability again become a reality in Zimbabwe. With my best wishes to you in your enormous duties and responsibilities of leading the United Nations.

Yours sincerely,
Rev. Dr Samuel Kobia
General secretary

- **Letter to H.E. Levy Mwanawasa, president, Republic of Zambia, expressing gratitude for the initiative to convene a summit about the political crisis in Zimbabwe, 11 April 2008**

Your Excellency,

The World Council of Churches welcomes the initiative of convening an emergency summit of the Southern Africa Development Community to address the growing political crisis paralysing life and safety in Zimbabwe. We strongly commend your intervention at this critical time and believe this will help to peacefully resolve the current political impasse. The World Council of Churches, together with the All Africa Conference of Churches, sent a team to monitor the 29 March elections in Zimbabwe and will continue its commitment for peace and stability. It is the sovereign right of the people of Zimbabwe to choose their leaders, define the future of their country and insist upon a peaceful transition.

I would like to take this opportunity to express the gratitude of the World Council of Churches and its 349 member churches representing more than 550 million Christians around the world for the wisdom and dedication with which you lead your nation and your commitment to peace and stability in Africa and the world.

May our Lord Jesus give you wisdom as you and the leaders of southern Africa meet this weekend. We pray for a peaceful and just outcome to the current situation.

Sincerely yours,
Rev. Dr Samuel Kobia
General secretary

- **Statement of concern by WCC general secretary about the integrity of elections, 25 April, 2008**

"Choose for each of your tribes individuals who are wise, discerning and reputable to be your leaders" (Deuteronomy 1:13)

Concerned about the integrity of elections, the World Council of Churches central committee stated recently that, "...in democratic systems, elections serve as a way for people to confer legitimacy on a participatory democratic political system. In order to ensure that an election truly reflects the will of the people, attention should be paid to pre- and post-electoral mechanisms."

Nearly one month ago on 29 March the people of Zimbabwe went to the polls to cast a vote for their future. Today they wait patiently but with growing apprehension while the Zimbabwe Election Commission continues to count and recount ballots. Each day that passes without the release of results reduces public confidence in the commission and in any results it may announce.

As the Zimbabwean people wait, there are repeated reports of organized violence against those who did not vote for the ruling party. What is happening in Zimbabwe raises new concerns that an electoral process in Africa is again being compromised by rigging and reprisals. Such actions must be stopped.

We support the call by church leaders in Zimbabwe for the United Nations and leaders of Africa and the Southern African Development Community to intervene and prevent a political crisis from escalating into mass violence. Meanwhile, a ship laden with weapons and ammunition recently purchased by the government of Zimbabwe has meandered up the coast of southern Africa in search of a port to offload its cargo. So far, Zimbabwe's neighbours – churches, labour unions, arms control groups and governments – have succeeded in turning this particular ship away. We commend them for stopping delivery of weapons likely to be used for violations of international law. The action is a demonstration of the SADC region's concern for arms controls. Further vigilance is needed, however, amid reports of similar arms deals destined for Zimbabwe at present.

Today the people of Zimbabwe suffer one of the highest unemployment rates in Africa, live with a 600,000 per cent annual inflation rate, daily shortages of food and fuel and now see added insecurity and an even more tenuous future.

The people of Zimbabwe have faithfully exercised their right to vote. An observer mission from the WCC and the All-Africa Conference of Churches was present and has issued its report. Initially the Zimbabwe government dignified the election by agreeing to measures that ensured a degree of transparency about outcomes at the local level. Now it is time for the government of Zimbabwe to step forward, declare the full and complete results of the election and act in accordance with the people's will. The longer the government remains silent about the real outcome of the election the greater the risk for the people of Zimbabwe and the future of their beloved country.

The World Council of Churches joins with churches across Zimbabwe in calling for the immediate release of the election results and for international support and action under the auspices of SADC, the African Union and the United Nations to achieve a peaceful resolution of this crisis.

Rev. Dr Samuel Kobia
WCC general secretary

- **Letter from WCC general secretary to member churches inviting them to observe a Day of Prayer for Peace in Zimbabwe, 17 June 2008**

Beloved friends in Christ,

At the initiative of brothers and sisters in Zimbabwe, we in the World Council of Churches invite you to join us in observing Sunday 22 June 2008 as the beginning of a season of prayer for the people and government of Zimbabwe.

On Friday 27 June 2008, the citizens of Zimbabwe will return to polling booths to cast ballots in a runoff election for the presidency. It is impossible to overstate the importance of this election, its fairness, its outcome and its aftermath. Events in the coming weeks will challenge the people of Zimbabwe and the world to find means of overcoming violence in the exercise of democracy, and the results will influence the future of the nation and the region.

On Sunday 22 June we request churches to observe a day of prayer for Zimbabwe; on that Sunday, and in the days that follow, we ask you to join millions of Christians throughout the world as we lift up Zimbabwe and its people to the Lord, ask God's blessing and pray that peace may prevail. We offer the following prayer as a petition to God for the people of Zimbabwe.

Eternal God:

In your sight nations rise and fall, and pass through times of trial.

*We pray with and for Zimbabwe in this hour of national decision,
and we ask your divine blessing on all the people of the land.*

May Zimbabwe's leaders seek justice by means that are just;

May the voters take action to promote the common good;

may international observers and mediators be guided by your wisdom.

Lead us not into temptation, Lord, and deliver your people from evil:

Empower us all to overcome anger, jealousy, division and violence;

help us to respect one another despite our differences;

and teach us the things that truly make for peace.

This we pray in the name of Jesus Christ our Saviour. Amen.

Through this and other prayerful actions, we will continue to support the people of Zimbabwe through the days and weeks ahead. In the love and unity of the triune God, we thank you for joining in this season of prayer.

Blessings,

Rev. Dr Samuel Kobia
General secretary, World Council of Churches

- **Letter from WCC general secretary to UN secretary general H.E. Mr Ban Ki-moon, calling on the UN to assist in ending the violence and humanitarian suffering in Zimbabwe, 18 June 2008**

Your Excellency,

I offer greetings on behalf of the constituency of the World Council of Churches (WCC).

We in the World Council continue to be concerned for the state of affairs in Zimbabwe following the preliminary round of voting on 29 March and in anticipation of balloting in the presidential runoff election of 27 June.

Representatives of churches and other organizations in Zimbabwe have been contacting and visiting us with news of recent events there. The WCC has also received an extensive dossier from the Dutch Reformed Church in South Africa prepared under the leadership of Dr Allan Boesak of the Uniting Reformed Church in Southern Africa. Such information, together with media reports of violence and intimidation in Zimbabwe, raises our apprehension and concern.

I am forwarding to you the dossier compiled by Dr Boesak and others, with their observations and recommendations, as an excellent and alarming source of information gathered on the ground.

We are dismayed at news of the brutality meted out by police and other government forces in Zimbabwe, and we are appalled at President Mugabe's statement last week that he and ZANU-PF would go to "war" rather than acknowledge an election victory by the opposition MDC if there were to come to pass. This attitude on the part of the president undermines the integrity of elections and belittles the Zimbabwean electorate.

The peace of Zimbabwe has been shattered. Harassment, beatings, arrests and ransacking of property have already extended into the churches as well as agencies of civil society.

Where the Mugabe government fails in its responsibility to protect the Zimbabwean people, the international community must assume that burden; in this endeavour, the United Nations should assume a leading role. We express our appreciation for the visit of senior UN official, Haile Menkerios, and pray these efforts have lasting impact.

I wish to commend and lend my support to the authors of the open letter "African Leaders Call for Free and Fair Elections in Zimbabwe" which has been widely circulated in newspapers and on the Internet. The authors' analysis of the situation is insightful, and they call attention to the pressing need for restoration of full access to humanitarian and

aid agencies, recruitment of an adequate number of international election observers and a strategy for uniting Zimbabweans following the election.

In light of the reports we have received, the WCC

1. Calls for an end to atrocities in Zimbabwe, as described in the attached Dossier,
2. Has invited the churches to set aside a season of prayer with Zimbabwe, beginning with a world-wide day of prayer on Sunday 22 June 2008,
3. Appeals to the government of Zimbabwe to assure free and fair elections,
4. appeals to the government to allow international election monitors in urban, suburban and rural areas,
5. Appeals to the government to allow and encourage humanitarian aid workers to fulfil the needs for water, food, medicine and other life-sustaining resources,
6. Calls on the churches, especially in southern Africa, to encourage a process of reconciliation in Zimbabwe as soon as the elections have concluded.

Free and fair elections are essential to democracy, and we are anxious to see the success of this process in Zimbabwe. As the WCC central committee stated in February of this year:

Although the Bible offers no description of the definitive political system, it indicates that every system has both the potential for participation, and for the abuse of power. For Christians, the Hebrew prophetic traditions – as well as the Christian tradition – offer the reminder that people of faith must embrace the responsibility to be engaged in the civil political systems of which they are a part... In democratic systems, elections serve as a way for people to confer legitimacy on a participatory democratic political system.

We in the WCC appreciate the many efforts being undertaken by the United Nations, and we thank you for your dedication to the well-being of humanity. Please know that the World Council and our member churches support you in the important work of transition and healing that faces the international community in Zimbabwe.

Sincerely,
Rev. Dr Samuel Kobia
General secretary

cc: HE President Thabo Mbeki, HE President Levy Mwanawasa, HE President
Jakaya Kikwete

- **Joint letter from the WCC and the WSCF regarding the rapidly deteriorating situation in Zimbabwe, 24 June 2008**

Letter sent to: H.E. Ban Ki-moon, secretary general, United Nations ; H.E. Levy Mwanawasa, chair, SADC, H.E. Jakaya Kikwete, chair, African Union

Excellencies,

We welcome the statement of 23 June by UN secretary general, Ban Ki-moon, and the preliminary action taken by the UN Security Council on Zimbabwe; we also welcome the statement of 23 June by the chair of SADC, H.E. Levy Mwanawasa.

It is now with profound concern that we call on you to increase your efforts to address the rapidly deteriorating situation in Zimbabwe. As church leaders representing more than 550 million Christians around the world, including members of many churches in Zimbabwe, we request that you direct urgent attention to the humanitarian needs of the people of Zimbabwe, their freedom to exercise religion, the destabilization of the political situation and the need to end human rights abuses.

Reports from those in and outside Zimbabwe persuade us that international intervention is now needed to distribute much-needed food aid. The government's decision to end food distribution by international agencies has led only to political isolation and increased suffering. Food and medicine are in particular demand, with the imminent threat of starvation in some areas. Education has also been disrupted, with some schools now housing government troops.

We have learned from our Zimbabwean brothers and sisters that some churches have been kept from offering worship while other church services have been violently dispersed. This situation, which is underreported in the media, is unacceptable and must receive urgent attention from the world community.

The much more publicized disintegration of the political situation can no longer be overlooked by the world.

We are concerned that Zimbabweans have been denied the right to choose their own leader in a free and fair election. The sovereignty of the people has been violated and must be restored.

The party that has created this violent situation on the ground now seems poised to be awarded the presidency, and with it the power to appoint additional senators who will sway the balance of parliament. Such a manipulation of the election process can have no legitimacy in the eyes of Zimbabweans or of the world. This precedent must not be set as the norm.

Charges have been made that serious crimes are being committed. These allegations must be investigated; if found to be substantial, alleged perpetrators must stand trial. The current election cycle has been reduced to a shambles. If the perpetrators of violence are not brought to account, attempts at a political solution will be fundamentally undermined. There can be no impunity.

The international community must insist on a political solution to the question of leadership in Zimbabwe. This may involve a postponement of the election, giving the time for the establishment of control mechanisms based on internationally accepted standards that would guarantee the unhindered expression of will of the people of Zimbabwe through truly free and fair elections. It is essential that the international community reaffirm the integrity of democratic elections as the means by which Zimbabwean citizens choose their leaders.

National governments clearly have the primary and sovereign responsibility to provide for the safety and well-being of their people. However, when there is egregious failure to carry out that responsibility, whether by neglect, lack of capacity, or direct assaults on the population, the international community has the duty to assist peoples and states, and in extreme situations, to intervene in the internal affairs of the state in the interests and safety of the people. When the State can no longer provide protection to its own people, the principle of non-intervention (art. 2.7 of the UN Charter) yields to the responsibility of the international community to protect them. This is the responsibility to protect (R2P).

At one time, Zimbabwe stood as the breadbasket of Africa. Its strengthening economy and growing freedoms served as a beacon of hope to all Africans who pursued the promise of a new Africa. Today Zimbabwe represents only suffering and hardship.

The people of Zimbabwe deserve better, and we as church leaders pray that the deep faith and perseverance of a proud people will once again emerge and be put in the service of rebuilding this society that is so tragically ravaged by distrust, dissension and violence.

The biblical prophet Amos proclaimed the coming of a day when “justice” would “roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream” (Amos 5:24). Our prayer is for the speedy arrival of that day in Zimbabwe, and our hope is that the international community will accept this prophecy as a vision and a goal.

In peace,

Rev. Dr Samuel Kobia
General secretary
World Council of Churches

Rev. Michael Wallace
General secretary
World Student Christian Federation

CC: H.E. President Thabo Mbeki, Republic of South Africa
Rev. Dr Mvume Dandala, general secretary, All Africa Conference of Churches
Mr Eddie Makue, chair, FOCCISA

- **Open statement by WCC general secretary after the elections in Zimbabwe, 4 July 2008**

The 27 June 2008 run-off elections in Zimbabwe took place despite wide-spread calls to cancel once the MDC candidate Mr Morgan Tsvangirai decided to withdraw his name from the election process, citing continued violence as a primary reason for his decision. The worldwide ecumenical family calls for intensified international monitoring of the situation. The World Council of Churches is prepared to participate in such a process jointly with the All Africa Conference of Churches and the Southern Africa Fellowship of Churches.

On 24 June 2008, the World Council of Churches and the World Student Christian Federation sent a letter to UN Secretary General Ban Ki-Moon, stating that:

“It is now with profound concern that we call on you to increase your efforts to address the rapidly deteriorating situation in Zimbabwe. As church leaders representing more than 550 million Christians around the world, including members of many churches in Zimbabwe, we request that you direct urgent attention to the humanitarian needs of the people of Zimbabwe, their freedom to exercise religion, the destabilization of the political situation and the need to end human rights abuses.”

There are still varying opinions as to how to move forward after what can be described as a façade election. There are reports that a large number of ballots were ‘spoiled’ by writings of protest on them by the persons who might have felt forced to vote, but did not really want to vote in an election that was so heavily flawed. Two of the most respected world leaders for justice, Archbishop Desmond Tutu and former South African President Nelson Mandela have each spoken, as has the African Union and the UN Security Council. All are looking for justice and compassion for those who are caught up in the continued violence, food shortages and political intimidation.

How the world addresses the situation in Zimbabwe, is the subject of much debate. As people of faith we always want to prevent violence. We want to react to situations of compelling human need with appropriate measures and to work toward the rebuilding of good will and reconciliation. We want this for the people of Zimbabwe.

We pray, and ask the international community to remember, not only the people of Zimbabwe but also the surrounding nations who have taken in many of the displaced persons from Zimbabwe. We pray for continued strength during these times of stress.

From Archbishop Tutu we heard these strong words:

“If you were to have a unanimous voice, saying quite clearly to Mr Mugabe... you are illegitimate and we will not recognize your administration in any shape or form – I think that would be a very, very powerful signal and would really strengthen the hand of the international community.”

In the words of Mr Nelson Mandela, President Mugabe is a case of “*tragic failure of leadership*”. The moral authority presented by Mr Mandela is important on these issues of justice. He has shared his sadness over the chaos prevailing in what used to be one of the most promising countries in Africa.

African Union (AU) foreign ministers gathered in the Egyptian town of Sharm el-Sheikh on 30 June and 1 July released a resolution that calls for the establishment of a government of national unity that would bring both parties together in leadership and that “SADC should establish a mechanism on the ground in order to seize the momentum for a negotiated solution.”

The church community has come at this issue from many perspectives. We have heard these comments from respected leaders within the continent of Africa. We will continue to be challenged in the coming days and weeks.

The United Nations Security Council, through a strong 23 June 2008 presidential statement:

“... expresses its concern over the impact of the situation in Zimbabwe on the wider region. The Council welcomes the recent international efforts, including those of SADC leaders and particularly President Mbeki. The Security Council calls on the Zimbabwean authorities to cooperate fully with all efforts, including through the UN, aimed at finding a peaceful way forward, through dialogue between the parties, that allows a legitimate government to be formed that reflects the will of the Zimbabwean people.”

“The Security Council further expresses its concern at the grave humanitarian situation in Zimbabwe and condemns the suspension by the Government of Zimbabwe of the operations of humanitarian organizations, which has directly affected one and a half million people, including half a million children. The Council calls on the Government of Zimbabwe to immediately allow humanitarian organizations to resume their services. (S/PRST/2008/23)”

We must take all the information coming to us into consideration as we proceed. For instance, because children and women are among the first to suffer if world governments choose to impose economic sanctions, the World Council of Churches remains firm in the call for humanitarian aid to meet the needs of the “least of these” (Matthew 25). The World Council of Churches remains resolute in its call to protect the population against increased and continued violence, “Do not repay evil for evil or abuse for abuse” (I Peter 3:9). The World Council of Churches looks forward to the day when Zimbabwe has an election that can truly be respected and seen as free, fair and just.

- **Joint global ecumenical leaders Statement on the Zimbabwe Political Parties Pact, 24 July 2008**

The statement was addressed to:

H.E President Thabo Mbeki, Republic of South Africa

President & First Secretary Robert Mugabe, ZANU PF Party

President Morgan Tsvangirai, Movement for Democratic Change

President Arthur Mutambara, Movement for Democratic Change

We, the leaders of the World Council of Churches, World Student Christian Federation, World YWCA, World Alliance of Reformed Churches and the World Alliance of YMCAs wish to congratulate the leadership of the ZANU PF party and the Movement for Democratic Change on signing the Memorandum of Understanding that paves way for the beginning of negotiations towards a lasting resolution of the difficult crisis in Zimbabwe.

We also wish to commend the role, in bringing the parties together, played by the SADC facilitator, HE President Thabo Mbeki of South Africa and his team; Dr Jean Ping, chair of the African Union Commission, the secretary general of the United Nations and his special envoy, Ambassador Haile Menkarios.

We believe that the will of the people should be the fundamental basis on which to ground negotiations.

And we greet the beginning of this critical round of negotiations with fervent hope for a new beginning for all Zimbabweans, restoration of peace, prosperity, dignity and the rule of law.

Restatement of principles and values

Having walked this journey alongside the churches, civil society and people of Zimbabwe, we urge you to remain mindful of the principles below;

1. **Good faith:** We pray for all the negotiators so that they are guided by the best interests and deeper aspirations of the people of Zimbabwe. We pray that the discussions will be held in complete good faith so that the final agreement becomes a foundation for a lasting and viable solution to the crisis in the country.
2. **Continuing violence and human rights abuses:** We are appalled by reports of continuing violence in many parts of the country, particularly in the rural areas. All forms of violence, harassment, intimidation and torture must cease immediately to provide an environment truly conducive for peaceful negotiations.
3. **Humanitarian situation:** We are saddened that there has not been an official withdrawal of the order banning the field operations of humanitarian aid agencies and NGOs in Zimbabwe. The World Food Programme has recently warned that if these agencies are not allowed immediate access to the communities in need, 5.1 million will face starvation. We therefore call upon the Zimbabwean authorities to immediately and without conditions lift the ban and allow humanitarian aid agencies and NGOs access to the communities in need.
4. **Rule of law, justice, accountability, reconciliation and healing:** We further urge the parties to remain committed to a genuine restoration of the rule of law that rejects impunity but allows true reconciliation and healing. Zimbabwe has witnessed horrific

incidences of violence during and after the elections of March 29 and June 27. Many people have lost relatives and friends. Thousands have lost homes and other property. Wounds cut deep. We, together with them, look to you for an agreement that provides for a safe return of displaced people, proper remedies and justice for survivors and their families.

5. **Inclusive participation:** We realize that the Memorandum of Understanding does not provide for the inclusion of civil society, churches, women and young people. None of the negotiating teams from the three parties includes a woman at a time when mothers and women of Zimbabwe continue to face the hardest part of the national challenge. This is most regrettable. We call on you to consider opening a place at the table for representatives of Zimbabwe civil society so that they also bring in the voice and aspirations of the grassroots communities with whom they continue to work closely.

Finally we would like to reaffirm the need to protect the integrity of elections as the most legitimate and democratic way to express the sovereign will of the people not only in Zimbabwe but throughout Africa. We pray that the negotiations you have begun will help restore faith in the electoral process as a democratic and peaceful means through which the people of Africa can demand accountability from their leaders and contribute to the governance and development of their own societies.

Thank you and may God bless you.

- **Letter to Zimbabwean government officials on implementation of the Global Political Agreement, 6 November 2009**

Letter sent to:

His Excellency Mr Robert Mugabe, president

His Excellency Mr Morgan Tsvangirai, prime minister

His Excellency Mr Arthur Mutambara, deputy prime minister

Excellencies,

Greetings from the World Council of Churches (WCC) in Geneva and the All Africa Conference of Churches (AACC) in Nairobi.

It is with great concern that we have been following the recent political situation in your country which leads to a setback of the unity accord agreed to amongst yourselves. Our two ecumenical organizations, operational at the global as well as at the continental level, have been awaiting the positive outcome of your earlier negotiations with great hope ever since the signing of the Global Political Agreement (GPA), which was facilitated by the African Union (AU) and the

Southern Africa Development Community (SADC). Their role in this respect is greatly appreciated.

The signing of the GPA was an historic event. Indeed, by signing this constructive and positive agreement you demonstrated political maturity which upheld honour and dignity not only in the African continent but also at the global level. By your timely action you proved that you put the interest of your nation ahead of the interest of your respective political parties and it was considered by the international community as a new step that would lead to overcoming any political impasse. However, the current political impasse in your country has been a negative signal as the recent political crisis poses a serious threat to the government of national unity which was established early this year after a prolonged political conflict.

Excellencies, the global and continental ecumenical bodies, the WCC and the AACC have had historic relationships with the people of Zimbabwe ever since they started their struggle against colonialism. The WCC's consistent position for peace with justice has been demonstrated in various ways over the decades through different programmes. The struggle of the people of Zimbabwe has always been a major concern of the members of the WCC and AACC.

It is in this context that we express our concern that the deteriorating political situation in recent time signals a derailing of the peace and reconciliation measures you have already agreed upon. We are of the opinion that this situation warrants a solution that needs willingness and commitment for a political compromise for the sake of the greater unity and well being of the nation. As the people of Zimbabwe have suffered long enough, they look for a situation where all Zimbabweans may have a dignified life. We, therefore, urge you to guard the GPA with security and hope and to ensure the timely implementation of all elements of the agreement.

Excellencies, we believe that the critical task ahead of you as leaders of your country and your people is to put what you have generously agreed upon and signed into concrete and timely action. This is what the people of Zimbabwe and the world at large are expecting from you.

Excellencies, as we continue to follow with great expectation that your cooperation will end the political deadlock soon, we uphold the leaders and people of Zimbabwe in our prayers.

“Blessed are the peace-makers”.

Respectfully yours,

Rev. Dr Samuel Kobia
General secretary, WCC

Rev. Dr Andre Karamaga
General secretary, AACC

cc: H.E. Dr Jean Ping AU chairperson

H. E. Dr Tomaz Salamo SADC executive secretary
Rev Dr Solmon Zwana, ZCC general secretary

- **Call by WCC and AACC general secretaries to observe a day of prayer for the people of Zimbabwe on 25 January “in midst of the current humanitarian, legitimacy and governance crisis”, 20 January 2009**

African churches call to pray and fast for Zimbabwe

The All Africa Conference of Churches (AACC) has called on Christians in Africa and in the worldwide ecumenical family to observe a day of prayer and fasting in solidarity with Zimbabwe on Sunday, 25 January.

In a letter to the AACC member churches and ecumenical partners dated 15 January, the AACC General Secretary Rev. Dr André Karamaga wrote: "The call is to join our Zimbabwean sisters and brothers in prayer and in fasting, in words and in deeds, in contemplation and in action," as they suffer from a spreading cholera epidemic, food shortage, and continuing political violence and intimidation.

The World Council of Churches General Secretary Rev. Dr Samuel Kobia has joined in the invitation by calling on the Council's member churches to observe the day of prayer for Zimbabwe: "As we have in the past, today again we invite Christians throughout the world to lift up Zimbabwe and its people in prayer in midst of the current humanitarian, legitimacy and governance crises," Kobia said.

Among those who have called on Christians to fast in solidarity with the people of Zimbabwe is also Nobel Peace Prize laureate Desmond Tutu, the former Anglican archbishop of Cape Town. Tutu told South Africa's Radio 702 on 11 January he was now fasting once a week in order to foster awareness of Zimbabwe's plight under the rule of Robert Mugabe.

Australia

- **Letter from WCC general secretary to the Hon. Kevin Rudd, prime minister of Australia, conveying appreciation at the speech he made to the Australian parliament on 13 February formally apologizing to Australia's Indigenous Peoples, 16 May 2008**

Your Excellency,

At the December 2007 Conference of Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), the World Council of Churches' delegation noted that Australia ratified the *Kyoto Protocol*. At the World Council of Churches' February 2008 central committee, a *Minute on Global Warming and Climate Change* was adopted which recognized that "indigenous people the world over maintain a respectful relationship with the environment", the aboriginal peoples notwithstanding. The special theme of the April-May 2008 Seventh Session of the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues was "Climate change, bio-cultural diversity and livelihoods: the stewardship role of indigenous peoples and new challenges".

A holistic correlation may be drawn vis-à-vis Australia's signing of the *Kyoto Protocol* and her understanding of the intuitive nature of the indigenous population in terms of environmental protection. This fact was again evidenced in the noble endeavour towards reconciliation with the aboriginal peoples undertaken by yourself in your historic parliamentary speech of 13 February 2008 where you apologized for the "stolen generations". This, in a wider context, shows that the government of Australia is gratefully moving towards its own restoration and regaining of self in terms of integration and any integrated sense of being as a world leader in holistic indigenous reconciliation.

The World Council of Churches wishes to formally convey to you our appreciation of your speech and the great step forward that has thus been taken in initiating reconciliation with Australia's indigenous peoples. At the same time, while we recognize this achievement, we urge the government to take the next step and sign on to the UN Declaration on the Rights of the Indigenous Peoples.

Yours sincerely,
Rev. Dr Samuel Kobia, general secretary

Democratic People's Republic of Korea

- **Meeting of WCC general secretary and WCC delegation with North Korean President Kim Yong-nam, 19 October 2009**

In a recent meeting with a delegation from the World Council of Churches (WCC) visiting Pyongyang, North Korean President Kim Yong-nam said a significant impetus to solving the nuclear weapons stand-off in the region would be for North Korea and the U.S. to meet “face-to-face with each other”.

Kim, the president of the Presidium of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) Supreme People's Assembly, said the region needs to be denuclearized. He alluded to a certain unfairness within the Six Party Talks, saying that the members of the talks are “all nuclear powers or enjoy nuclear protection by the United States” with the sole exception of North Korea.

He also said that the armistice agreement which effectively ended the Korean War but did not bring peace to the region “should be replaced with a peace agreement between North Korea and the United States”.

Kim's comments were made during his 70-minute meeting with the WCC general secretary, the Rev. Dr Samuel Kobia, on Monday afternoon 19 October in Pyongyang.

Kim is one of the three principal leaders of North Korea along with Kim Jong-il, the supreme leader, and Kim Yong-il, the premier. Kim Yong-nam is often described as the de facto leader since he often represents the country on state visits around the world and in the signing of treaties on behalf of the DPRK.

Kobia and the WCC delegation were in North Korea at the invitation of the Korean Christian Federation (KCF) visiting churches and holding discussions with North Korean church leaders in advance of a three-day consultation on the church and Korean reunification being held in Hong Kong, 21 to 23 October.

Four North Korean church leaders were planning to attend the consultation. There will also be nearly 50 South Korean church leaders and another 80 church leaders from a dozen other countries around the world, including delegations from the U.S., Canada, China, Australia, Cambodia, Indonesia, India, Thailand, Great Britain, Germany, Japan and Russia.

The WCC has been instrumental in bringing representatives of the two Korean church families together for more than 25 years in what is called the Tozanso Process, in which WCC member churches have joined Korean Christians to explore efforts at reunification of the peninsula.

During his meeting with Kobia, Kim talked about how the North Korean government has assisted over the years in rebuilding churches that were destroyed during the Korean War and the bombing of Pyongyang by the U.S.

He invited the WCC to continue its relationship with the Korean Christian Federation through ongoing visits to the country.

Commenting further on the nuclear weapons situation of North Korea, Kim said the solution was to denuclearize the entire region. Creating a nuclear free Korean peninsula was “one of the last instructions from the Great Leader”, former North Korean leader Kim Il-sung, who is called the “eternal leader” of North Korea and died in 1994.

Kobia said the position of the WCC is that “those who have nuclear weapons should get rid of them and those wanting them should no longer seek them”.

Kim pointed out that all of the other members of the Six Party Talks were either nuclear powers (China, Russia and the U.S.) or nations “under the nuclear protection policy of the U.S.” (Japan and South Korea).

Kobia told Kim that from the perspective of the WCC and its member churches, “we as Christians will continue to work for peace, as Jesus Christ is the Prince of Peace and a peacemaker in the world”, and that all in the WCC “look forward to the day when the Koreas will be reunified and families will be reunited.”

Others present at the meeting were the Rev. Kang Yong Sop, chairman of the KCF, and the Rev. Ri Rong Ji, director of KCF, as well as WCC delegation members Mathews George Chunakara, Christina Papazoglou, Mark Beach and Peter Williams.

Fiji

- **Letter from WCC general secretary to Mr Isikeli Kini of the Methodist Church in Fiji following the arrest of several church leaders and the ban on the church’s annual conference, 23 July 2009**

Dear Mr Isikeli Kini,

Warm greetings in the name of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

We acknowledge with thanks your letter received on 22 July 2009 requesting the WCC to assist the submission of the Methodist Church of Fiji and Rotuma to the UN Universal Period Review.

We take note that this request is formulated in the midst of the difficult situation the Methodist Church of Fiji and Rotuma is currently facing. Indeed, the arrest of church

leaders and the ban on the church's annual conference are serious challenges to the life and witness of the churches in Fiji and the entire Pacific region. Having personally met with some of the church leaders during my visits to Fiji, it is with great concern that I hear of their detention.

We are keeping abreast with the situation in Fiji. Your request on the submission of the Methodist Church of Fiji and Rotuma to the UN Universal Periodic Review will be shared with our colleagues working in our Public Witness programme who often support churches' submissions to UPR sessions and we will respond in due time. We will do our best to provide resources to help the Methodist Church during this difficult period.

The World Council of Churches and the global ecumenical family stand in solidarity and prayer with the churches and people of Fiji.

May God give you the strength of the faith and of hope to be witnesses to His Love as you face hard times.

Rev. Dr Samuel Kobia
General secretary

- **Minute on the situation facing the Methodist Church in Fiji and Rotuma, adopted by the WCC central committee, 26 August–2 September 2009**

“If one member suffers, all suffer together with it.” (1 Corinthians 12:26)

1. In December 2006 the elected government of Fiji, a Pacific island nation of some 920,000 people, was overthrown in a military coup and an “interim government” was installed, with the head of the military, Commodore Frank Bainimarama serving as prime minister. In April 2009 the Fiji Court of Appeal declared that the coup was illegal. Within days the interim government abrogated the national constitution, dismissed the judiciary, brought in censorship of the media and announced public emergency regulations, which, among other things, require government permits to be issued for meetings to be held, including church meetings.
2. The population of Fiji consists of two main groups – indigenous Fijians, around 55% of the population, and Indian Fijians who are descended from labourers brought from India in the 19th century, around 42% of the population. The vast majority of indigenous Fijians are Christian (over 95%) and Christianity is very much part of indigenous Fijian culture, especially through the Methodist church. The Indian Fijians are mostly Hindu (28% of the overall population) or Muslim (6%).
3. Almost two-thirds of indigenous Fijians belong to the Methodist Church, a World Council of Churches (WCC) member church. Overall around 35% of Fijians are Methodists (327,000 members, including some Indian Fijians). The Roman Catholic

Church is the second largest with around 60,000 members. The Anglican Church, with around 8,000 members, is the only other WCC member church in Fiji.

4. Military coups also took place in 1987 and 2000. These earlier coups were regarded as supportive of the political interests of the indigenous Fijians, and it is generally perceived that the Methodist Church, with its strong indigenous membership, supported these coups. The 2006 coup, however, is perceived as favouring the Indian Fijian population, and the interim government has significantly diminished the place of traditional Fijian culture in Fiji's national life. One example is that the role of the previously very powerful Council of Chiefs has been terminated by the interim government.
5. Immediately after the 2006 coup, the Methodist Church issued statements deploring the coup and protesting the illegality of the interim government. Many smaller churches joined the Methodists in publicly stating this view, but it is noted with regret that there is little communication between the Methodist, Anglican and Roman Catholic churches at present. The Methodist Church has maintained its public stance on the illegality of the interim government since 2006. The church has therefore refused to take part in processes initiated by the interim government for community participation in planning for the future of Fiji. While this policy of the church is understandable and perfectly valid, it means the church has unfortunately sidelined itself from processes which may well have a large influence on the nature of Fiji in the future
6. Since May 2009, the interim government has taken these actions against the Methodist Church:
 - banned the church from holding its annual 2009 conference, the chief governing body of the church (and the ban may stay in place until after the planned return to democracy in 2014);
 - banned the annual choir festival of the church, which is held in association with the conference and which assists in the annual raising of funds for the life and mission of the church;
 - arrested and charged nine Methodist leaders, including the president and general secretary, with breaches of the emergency regulations; all nine have been released on bail, with strict conditions as to what they can and cannot do, including the surrender of their passports;
 - ordered the church not to hold a service of induction of its president and general secretary, scheduled to take place on 23 August;
 - banned the weekly radio programme of the Methodist Church and the weekly radio program conducted by the Methodist general secretary.
7. In August 2009 the WCC arranged for a team of three church leaders from neighbouring countries to visit Fiji, particularly to express solidarity and support for the Methodist Church at this time. The WCC records its gratitude to the Pacific Conference of Churches (PCC) for the PCCs organizational assistance and hospitality generously provided to the WCC team. The team met with leaders of the

Methodist church and participated in worship in Centenary Church, Suva, on 23 August. The team also met with leaders of the PCC, with Anglican Bishop Apimeleki Qiliho, with several non-governmental organizations, and with Prime Minister Bainimarama. The prime minister asserts strongly that among the leaders of the Methodist Church there are ethno-nationalists whom he regards more as politicians than church leaders, and that it is the ethno-nationalist political aspirations and actions of these leaders that have caused his government to act against the church. The team was pleased to receive an assurance from the prime minister that the interim government is open to dialogue with the Methodist Church.

8. There is a vast diversity of opinion among Fijians concerning the interim government. Viewpoints range from strong support for the interim government, especially for its actions towards a more just multiracial and multi-faith society, to outright opposition to the interim government and all it appears to stand for. Some are concerned that while the interim government states it plans a return to democracy in 2014, that date might be further extended and Fiji might be ruled in the long term by a military dictatorship or military junta. These different viewpoints are present also within the membership of the Methodist Church.
9. The Methodist Church has a firm commitment not to respond to the interim government's actions in any way that might lead to public protests against the government and to possible violence and bloodshed. The church wishes dearly to find a peaceful resolution of the difficulties they face. The church is open to discussions with the interim government, with or without the assistance of a mediator, and is open to reviewing its policy of non-participation in community and government processes considering the future of Fiji.

The central committee of the WCC, meeting in Geneva, Switzerland, 26 August – 2 September 2009, therefore:

- A. **Expresses** deep concern at the actions taken by the interim government of Fiji against the Methodist Church in Fiji and Rotuma.
- B. **Commends** the Methodist Church in Fiji and Rotuma for its careful and measured response to the actions taken against the church by the interim government of Fiji.
- C. **Encourages** the Pacific Conference of Churches to facilitate increased dialogue among the churches in Fiji, especially between the Methodist, Anglican and Roman Catholic churches.
- D. **Urges** the Methodist Church in Fiji and Rotuma to seek opportunity to engage in dialogue with the interim government.
- E. **Encourages** the Methodist Church in Fiji and Rotuma, while maintaining its stand on the illegality of the interim government, to consider participating in community and government processes which give consideration to the future of Fiji's political, economic, social and interreligious life.
- F. **Requests** the WCC general secretary to respond promptly to any requests and suggestions from Fijian churches for possible further WCC actions in support of the church in Fiji.

- G. *Calls upon* WCC member churches to pray for the nation and people of Fiji, that a peaceful return to democracy and the rule of law, and a vibrant and peaceful multiracial and multi-faith community, will emerge as soon as possible.

India

- **Letter of congratulations from WCC general secretary to Metropolitan Dr Joseph Mar Irenaeus, the new head of the Mar Thoma Church, on his enthronement, 1 October 2007**

Your Eminence,

It is with great joy that I received the message that you will be enthroned as the new Malankara Mar Thoma metropolitan on 2 October 2007 in a divine and historic function. Your Eminence, it is with profound happiness that I take this opportunity to extend to you our hearty congratulations, prayers and best wishes on the occasion of your enthronement as the 21st Mar Thoma metropolitan to occupy the Holy Apostolic Throne of St. Thomas after the reestablishment of the episcopacy in the 17th century. In fact, this historic event is a moment of very great joy for the whole Church, especially the members of the Mar Thoma Syrian Church who are scattered in many parts of the world.

Your Eminence, you bring with you a wealth of experience, rich heritage and tradition to this exalted position. I fondly remember my visit to your historic ancestral home at Maramon village from where four generations of Malankara Mar Thoma metropolitans were enthroned as the heirs of the Holy See of St. Thomas over the past centuries. Almost a century later, it is you now being called by divine grace to follow in the foot steps of those great ecclesiastical luminaries from your own family who have provided leadership to this ancient and historic church in Asia. May God almighty continue to bless you to be instrumental in nurturing the spiritual fervour, evangelical zeal and social commitment of the Mar Thoma Church which has a unique ethos and tradition.

We thank God that He has enabled you to give leadership in church and society in various ways over the years. Your contributions to the ecumenical movement have been significant. Your leadership as president of the Kerala Council of Churches, president of the National Council of Churches in India and president of the Christian Conference of Asia has been remarkable. You have participated in and provided leadership at various global ecumenical events, including the WCC assemblies in Canberra, Harare, and Porto Alegre. Your commitment and passion for peace and reconciliation efforts and your deep involvement in peace monitoring missions in conflict and violence affected areas in North East India, Sri Lanka and Cambodia have been appreciated and valued by the ecumenical family. Your ability to recognize the spiritual essence of pastoral care, and your gift for nurturing and sustaining friendship and fellowship with people from all walks of life across religious or ideological boundaries has been proven as unique. Your concern and compassion for the poor and the needy in society epitomized in your deep involvement in social development, emergency relief and rehabilitation initiatives during

times of humanitarian crises, have on several occasions been appreciated in the ecumenical family and beyond.

May I also take this opportunity to remember the contributions of your predecessor, the 20th Malankara Mar Thoma metropolitan Dr Philipose Mar Chrysostom who gave profound leadership to the Mar Thoma Church and the ecumenical movement as a whole over the past several decades. As he relinquishes his office due to old age and declining health, I thank God for his life and witness and pray for God's divine grace upon him.

Your Eminence, I pray that the Lord may grant you abundant blessings to fulfill the mission entrusted to you and face the challenges of this world as you shepherd your entire flock, scattered over many parts of the globe.

Again, my prayers and best wishes.

Yours in His Service,

Rev. Dr Samuel Kobia
General secretary

- **Joint letter from WCC and LWF to Dr Manmohan Singh, prime minister of India, regarding the violence against Christians in the State of Orissa, 4 July 2008**

Your Excellency,

The World Council of Churches and the Lutheran World Federation have been monitoring with deep concern the situation in the State of Orissa, in India. We have been told by our member churches in India that the indiscriminate killings, burning of church buildings and destruction of institutions continues in Gajapati and Khandamal districts and other parts of the state. We are aware that it is the most vulnerable sections of the population who are worst affected by the violence.

India is a country with a long heritage of harmony and peace and has enshrined into its constitution religious freedoms as well as commitments to uphold the rights and dignity of all its citizens.

We therefore appeal to you to use your good office to intervene in this situation so as to ensure an immediate cessation of violence, the restoration of law and justice, and sanctuary for the displaced. We request you to also ensure more long term support to the communities most affected so that they can reconstruct their lives.

We pray for your great country and its people, especially for the people of the State of Orissa.

Rev. Dr Samuel Kobia
General secretary
World Council of Churches

Rev. Dr Ishmael Noko
General secretary
Lutheran World Federation

- **Letter from WCC general secretary to member churches in India, NCCI, Utkal Christian Council and Jeypore Evangelical Lutheran Church expressing the solidarity and prayerful support of WCC member churches and partners following the violence being perpetrated against Christians in the State of Orissa, 3 September 2008**

Dear partners in the ministry of the Lord,

It is with great concern that we have been following the news about the unfortunate events of violence in Orissa during the past three weeks. We have heard that people are being killed, houses burnt, thousands are living in relief camps, and churches and church properties are being destroyed. Religious fanaticism has once again broken the lives of the poor, who are largely Dalits and Adivasis.

We have also heard about the efforts of the churches and Christian leaders across the length and breadth of India appealing to people to strive for peace and reconciliation and to pray for all victims of this violence. We welcome the call given by the National United Christian Forum to observe 7 September 2008 as a *Day of Prayer and Fasting* for peace and goodwill. We are urging all our member churches and partners worldwide to join in this initiative by praying for the families of those who have lost their dear ones, for those who are displaced, for all others who suffer the consequences of this violence and for all those who are striving to restore trust and goodwill among people and communities.

On behalf of the member churches and partners of the World Council of Churches, I am writing to express our solidarity and extend our prayerful support to you all as you go through these turbulent and challenging times, and encourage you to witness to the love and peace of God in Jesus Christ amidst hatred and aggression. Even as we suffer, as we are told, let us overcome evil with good (Rom.12:21). Let us pray for harmony among religious communities and let us work together to build trust and mutual respect.

May the God of peace fill our hearts and minds with the love of Christ, through the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, so that we may all strive to establish God's reign of peace, justice and life for all.

Yours in Christ,
Rev. Dr Samuel Kobia
General secretary

- **Statement on religious violence and intolerance in India, adopted by the WCC executive committee, Lübeck, Germany, 23-26 September 2008**

*“Open your mouth for the mute,
or the rights of all the unfortunate.
Open your mouth, judge righteously,
And defend the rights of the afflicted and needy”.*
(Proverbs 31:8-9)

1. Religious tolerance has been the basic tenet and hallmark of India's ancient civilization and history. For centuries, people practicing various religious faiths have lived side by side in peace. India's rich tradition of religious plurality has been a symbol of social and religious harmony. However, that situation has been changing in recent years as religious intolerance has emerged as a dominant factor in conflicts. Religious violence has increased in recent years in several parts of India. The organized violence, inhuman acts and atrocities against religious minorities were carried out with full impunity under the eyes of law enforcement authorities. The growing environment of religious intolerance and violence has already claimed many lives in India.

2. The new wave of attacks against Christians was triggered by the killing of a Hindu leader, Swami Laxanananda Saraswati, along with five other people at Tumudibandh, Kandhamal District, in Orissa on 23 August 2008. The rebellious Maoist Naxalite groups prominent in this region have admitted responsibility for the murder of Swami and his followers. In addition, the state police authorities have stated that the killing was carried out by the Maoists. However, leaders of certain fundamentalist Hindu organizations blamed Christians for these killings. Despite the condemnation expressed by Christian groups and churches at the killing of the Swami and his associates and their demand for the culprits to be caught and punished, in retaliation, the extremist Hindu organizations have engaged in a series of attacks against Christians throughout the State of Orissa. The minority Christians in Orissa have been experiencing various forms of atrocities in recent weeks including looting, destruction of churches and church-run institutions, brutal attacks against priests, nuns, church workers and other members of the Christian community, most of whom are Dalits and Adivasis (tribals). Reports from various sources confirmed that at least fifty thousand Christians in Orissa have been displaced; hundreds of Christians have fled their homes and taken refuge in forests; many others are living in 18 relief camps, and find themselves threatened in the camps as well. The plight of the victims and survivors of this communal carnage, the fear and trauma they are experiencing, the poor and unhygienic facilities in the government-run relief camps, the inefficiency of government machinery in tackling the violence, continue to be a serious concern. The upsurge of religious extremism in Orissa in recent weeks has left many Christians in Orissa virtually defenceless.

3. This new wave of organized violence against Christians, which started in Orissa, has now spread to other States such as Madhya Pradesh, Karnataka and Kerala. Attacks orchestrated by Hindu extremist groups against the Christians are considered as an

organized plot and just one link in a long chain of events that have continued to strain communal harmony and interreligious relations in the country. Although the attacks against Christians are interpreted as religious violence, in most circumstances the under current is based on socioeconomic factors. Christians in the country have been repeatedly accused of encouraging conversion to Christianity. Various churches have been unequivocal in their official documents and statements and go on ad nauseam that conversion to Christianity by force or fraudulent means is strictly prohibited.

4. The violence and threats against the Christians of India is an assault on the Constitution of India. The Indian Constitution declares India to be a “sovereign socialist secular democratic republic” which secures to all citizens “justice; liberty of thought, expression, belief, faith and worship; and equality of status and opportunity”. Under articles 14, 15 and 16 of the Indian Constitution, discrimination based on religion is prohibited. Article 25 guarantees the right to freely practice and propagate religion. In addition to these constitutional guarantees at the domestic level, India is also party to several international treaties that stipulate human rights obligations. Article 18 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights establishes the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion. Article 26 bars discrimination on the grounds of religion while Article 27 stipulates that in “those states in which ethnic, religious or linguistic minorities exist, persons belonging to such minorities shall not be denied the right, in community with the other members of their group, to enjoy their own culture, to profess and practice their own religion...”. However, the rights and freedoms of the people are not merely guaranteed but also protected by various States in India. India now has seven states, which have legislation banning religious conversions. The seven Indian states with anti-conversion legislation (known as the Freedom of Religion Acts), include Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Orissa, Arunachal Pradesh, Rajasthan, Gujarat and Himachal Pradesh. Hindu extremists commonly use anti-conversion legislation to falsely accuse Christians of converting people through force or allurement; thus justifying subsequent attacks on Christians. They also deflect prosecution away from themselves by pressing charges of “forcible conversion” without any evidence.

5. The churches and Christian leaders in India have been making considerable efforts for appealing to people to strive for peace and reconciliation. The call given by the United Christian Forum comprised of the National Council of Churches in India, the Catholic Bishops Conference of India and the Evangelical Fellowship of India to observe a Day of Prayer and Fasting for Peace and Reconciliation was very well received by Christians all over the country. People at large have appreciated the efforts by various churches to promote and restore trust and goodwill among people of all religions and communities. The church leaders in the country appealed to all members of Christian community in the country to work for the welfare of all sections of people in society in spite of such horrendous experiences of violence and death of some members of the community. As the World Council of Churches is deeply disturbed by these developments of religious violence in Orissa and has expressed its concern in a letter by the general secretary addressed to the prime minister of India. A pastoral letter from WCC general secretary expressing sympathy and solidarity to suffering Christians in

Orissa was sent to WCC member churches in India and the National Council of Churches in India.

6. As the growing religious extremism and increasing violence against religious minorities in India is putting the secular credibility of India at risk, all religious groups in India have the responsibility to desist from spreading communal hatred . People should be reminded of the value and guiding principle in life that “Do not go about spreading slander among your people. Do not do anything that endangers your neighbour’s life”. (Leviticus 19:16).

The executive committee of the World Council of Churches, meeting in Lübeck, Germany from 23-26 September 2008, therefore:

A. **Expresses** its concern about the alarming trend of growing communal violence and religious intolerance in India;

B. **Expresses** its concern about the organized violence and atrocities against Christians in Orissa and other parts of India;

C. **Appeals** to the central and state governments to take necessary measures to bring back hundreds of Tribal and Dalit Christian villagers in Kandhmal, Orissa who are still hiding for their lives in forests;

D. **Urges** the government of India to take steps to prevent violence, and harassments against the Christian minorities in Orissa and other parts of the country and take appropriate actions against actors responsible for attacks;

E. **Urges** the Orissa government to take immediate steps to rehabilitate the victims in their own villages and provide compensations and grant for them to rebuild their houses;

F. **Appeals** to the government, civil society organizations, religious groups and political parties to initiate confidence building measures to restore mutual trust , peace and reconciliation among people of different faiths in affected areas;

G. **Supports** the initiatives taken by churches in India to ensure peace and reconciliation in spite of their struggle, pain and agony;

H. **Commends** the role played by church leaders at various levels, especially their readiness to be engaged in dialogue with other religious leaders and the appeal made to Christians to be restrain from any retaliation;

I. **Urges** the government authorities in India to meet its constitutional obligations to ensure that religious minorities may equally enjoy freedom of conscience and the right to freely profess practice and adopt religion.

- **Letter from WCC general secretary to Dr Manmohan Singh, prime minister of India in response to the terrorist attacks in Mumbai, 27 November 2008**

Your Excellency,

We have been deeply shocked and saddened by the news of the terrorist attacks on Mumbai last night which killed more than 100 people and injured more than 250 others. The World Council of Churches, whose membership includes most of India's Christian churches, strongly condemns such wanton acts of terrorism and violence targeting innocent human lives. We believe that there can be no justification whatsoever for such despicable acts of terrorism and indiscriminate violence.

By expressing our strong condemnation of this act of terrorism, we express our sincere condolences and sympathy to the Government and People of India, especially to the families of those who were killed and injured. We hold all citizens of India in our thoughts and prayers as you pass through this tragic and critical time.

As people of faith who believe in the sacredness of life of every human being, we are committed to working with governments and all people of goodwill to build communities where all will live in peace and security regardless of who or where they are.

Yours in the name of peace,
Rev. Dr Samuel Kobia
General secretary

Indonesia

- **Oral intervention to the UN Human Rights Council, on item 4, general debate: the human rights situation in the province of Papua, Indonesia, 11 March, 2008**

Mr President,

On behalf of the World Council of Churches, we would like to draw your attention to the human rights violations in Indonesia's Province of Papua. Obviously, Indonesia experienced a democratization process which has altered the political and jurisdictional scenery in many positive ways. We particularly welcome the ratification of the major international human rights instruments by the Government of Indonesia.

However, the fate of the indigenous people of Papua is hardly known to the international community, despite the fact that the Province of Papua is one of the richest region of the world in terms of natural resources. The people of Papua however have never benefited

from this richness and rather suffered from the inappropriate implementation of their economic, social and cultural rights. The Province of Papua shows the second lowest Human Development Index (2004-2006) in Indonesia, with the lowest level of adult literacy and the highest infant and maternal mortality rates in the country. The Special Autonomy Law from 2001 which aims at strengthening the economic, social and cultural rights of Papuans has not been properly implemented and Papuans remain marginalized.

Papuans still are subject to torture, ill-treatment, arbitrary arrests and unfair trials by the Indonesian authorities; as e.g. Manfred Nowak in relation to torture and ill-treatment recently revealed in his report to HRC. In addition: On 18 October 2007, the lawyer's assistant and human rights worker Iwanggin Sabar Olif (43) was arrested in Jayapura by members of the Anti-Terror Special Force Unit of the National Police (Detachment 88) without a warrant arrest. Iwanggin Sabar Olif is accused of sending a short-message (SMS) which insults the Indonesian President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono. We ask: Is it a mere incident, that the arrest and trial is conducted exclusively against an assistant lawyer and human rights activist? According to our understanding, the case of Iwanggin Sabar Olif reveals a pattern of arbitrary and disproportional arrest by members of Indonesian's Anti-Terror Unit.

The right of an independent and fair trial is repeatedly violated in Papua. In the court trial against 23 men allegedly charged for their involvement in the Abepura riots of March 2006, violations are reported against the presumption of innocence, the use of coerced confessions by the Panel of Judges and a climate of fear due to the presence of armed police officers and members of the intelligences services. Contrary to that, until now only one case (Abepura 2000) of crimes against humanity in Papua was brought to the National Human Rights Court in Makassar. The suspects of this case, two senior police officers, who faced command responsibility charges for the killing of 3 Papuan students and the torture of around 100 others, were acquitted. It is unfortunately not the only case of impunity to be attributed to the Indonesian government and its security forces in Papua.

Mr President,

There are reasons to conclude that the mentioned concerns on human rights relates to the ongoing militarization of Papua, particular of the highlands and the Southern part of Papua. According to our information, indigenous Papuans, who are critical towards the Indonesian security forces demanding the protection of their rights, are frequently stigmatized of being separatists and, thus, are subject to intimidation and harassment, as the case of the community of Waris, Keerom Regency, and its pastor John Jongga (48) shows. On 22 August 2007, Kopassus Commander Letty Usman allegedly threatened to kill the priest and bury him in a 700-metre deep gorge without being held accountable.

This pattern of intimidation is translated also into racial discrimination towards the indigenous people of Papua. The National Commission on Human Rights (Komnas HAM) in Jakarta reports several statements by members of security forces towards Papuan students related to the Abepura Case 2000 which are grave insults based on the Melanesian origin of Papuans. But when the government should protect the fundamental

rights of indigenous Papuans, we face a policy as the Presidential Instruction No. 26 of 1998 which bans the use of the term “indigenous” in all official documents denying the cultural identity.

Mr President,

The silent violation of the rights of the indigenous people of Papua, obviously, need the attention of the Human Rights Council. But: The access to Papua for outside human rights workers, journalists and even diplomats is restricted leading to a lack of accurate exchange of data about the human rights situation in Indonesia’s eastern Province. Therefore, the World Council of Churches asks the Human Rights Council to send a fact-finding mission to the Province of Papua in order to assess particularly the right to health and education. We further ask for a visit of the special rapporteur on the Independence of Judges and lawyers, the special rapporteur on the right to food, the Working Group on arbitrary detention, and the special rapporteur on the situation of human rights and fundamental freedoms of Indigenous People.

Thank you, Mr President

- **NGO Report-Universal Periodic Review, submitted by CCIA for consideration in April 2008**

We submit the following written report on the situation of ongoing human rights violations in West Papua, Indonesia, to the attention of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, for first consideration in the Universal Periodic Review of the Republic of Indonesia. We focus on Indigenous Peoples’ Rights as well as Economic, Social and Cultural Rights in West Papua.

Indonesia is state party to most of the UN human rights conventions and treaties and as member of the UN Human Rights Council subject to the highest standards on human rights. We recognize that Indonesia has gradually improved its human rights performance in recent years, e.g. by ratifying the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) in 2006. Indonesia improved its institutional sector and the current Government of Indonesia articulated its willingness to properly address human rights issues.

Nevertheless, human rights violations are still continuing, particularly in relation to indigenous peoples in West Papua. Genuine indigenous rights – i.e. self-determination in terms of political representation, ownership and management of natural resources, participation in development matters stressing an indigenous-suited approach – are denied by simply ignoring the fact of indigenous existence.

West Papua has been the scene of egregious human rights violations over the years while the indigenous Papuans struggled for being distinct in cultural terms stemming from a

Melanesian background. Indigenous Papuans are discriminated in terms of systematic marginalization in economic and social life as well as in mental categories being blamed as notoriously being backward. The focus here relates to the systematic and biased access to Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ESC Rights) disfavoured systematically indigenous Papuans compared to non-indigenous Papuans (e.g., transmigrants). Several studies on education, health, housing particularly at the rural side – where indigenous Papuans are still a majority – show the ongoing gap of protection and promotion of these fundamental rights.

Indigenous Papuans have been made to suffer enforced poverty, economic subjugation, poor educational attainment and healthcare, social and demographic changes imposed from the outside, and the destruction of their special identity and culture. Up to the recent past, natural resources have been rapaciously exploited, which left the indigenous West Papuans bereft of a viable infrastructure and prevented them from proper education, health care, vocational training etc.

A third area refers to the biased implementation of the Special Autonomy Law while the GoI should guarantee special procedures of decision making by and consultation of genuine Papuan institutions to be established and conducted in accordance with national and international law. The Special Autonomy Law should have provided means by which the Papuans can achieve greater control over their own affairs being a legal platform for the Papuan communities to develop their own institutions and rulings. Properly implemented, it might be a source of empowerment enabling indigenous Papuans to improve their economic status and social life as well.

Regarding these rights of indigenous Papuans in Indonesia, this report assesses the permanent denial of these rights by the Government of Indonesia presents recommendations to the Universal Periodic Review of the HRC and provides case reports as an attachment to the report.

Recent developments

Indonesia has build-up a large military presence in West Papua far beyond any reasonable security justification or strategic need. This build-up increased the tensions in the Papuan territory and contributed to the deterioration of the human rights situation, to the high level of impunity (including past abuses) particularly when it comes to the involvement of security personnel into the harassment of human rights defenders. According to many studies on the ground, the human rights situation in West Papua has shown no signs of improvement up to November 2007. Human rights violations have rather continued on a routine basis, security personnel instigated against and intimidated human rights defenders, political activists and religious leaders.

Recommendations to the UNHRC:

- assess the commitment of Government of Indonesia in order to strengthen the capacity of self-organization of the indigenous Papuan people and its institution-building

- assess the commitment of Government of Indonesia in relation to the culture of the indigenous Papuans with particular reference to the threats posed by factual discrimination
- assess the commitment of Government of Indonesia on its obligation and responsibility to make means and measures of the ESC Rights available particularly to indigenous Papuan people in order to meet the minimal standards;
- assess the commitment of Government of Indonesia in relation to other international and UN-based bodies, such as WHO and UNICEF, in order to be accordingly provided with the necessary expertise and technical assistance
- ask the Government of Indonesia to establish a mechanism with international participation (i.e. mechanisms of the UN) to accompany the implementation of the mentioned international covenants
- in the light of the mentioned discrepancies, investigate with statistical illustrations the fundamental elements of indigenous Papuan social life: demography, governance and administration, education, health, and the conditions of employment and income generation in the informal sector.

Appendix

NGO Report for the Universal Periodic Review of Indonesia by CCIA / WCC

Indonesia: Indigenous Peoples' Rights as well as Economic, Social and Cultural Rights – The case of West Papua

Papua is the gate for Asia and Pacific, the most Eastern and largest province in Indonesia, with 410.000 square km of area (20% of the total land of Indonesia), with the most challenging topography in Indonesia and the largest lowland, highest mountain, largest swamp areas. It is the province with the largest number of endemic species of flora and fauna – unique and rich (i.e. Lawrence National Park has been declared as World Heritage by the UNESCO; but without a plan to how maintain that richness). In relation to wealth and natural resources, Papua is rich in copper, gold, silver, iron, uranium, oil and gas, fishery, and vast tracts of timber, and at the same time the most backward province in Indonesia in terms of infrastructure (road, bridge, harbour, airstrip/airport, electricity, water, telecommunication). The total population amounts to approx. 2,3 Mio. inhabitants (less than 1% of Indonesian population) with an indigenous population of approximately 1,2 Mio. Of these indigenous Papuans, 70% live in rural areas, 75% are subsistence farmers. Papua has a variety of ethnic groups (more than 260 local languages)⁵⁹.

Indigenous peoples in West Papua

Though the situation on West Papua is much complex, and the critical issues vary from one region to another, there are some dimensions of conflict in Papua, which can be generalised as affecting the very existence of the indigenous Papuans. Genuine indigenous rights – i.e., self-determination in terms of political representation, ownership and management of natural resources, participation in development matters stressing an

⁵⁹ To West Papua and its indigenous peoples see Evangelical Church in the Rhineland 2005, the contribution of Siegfried Zoellner

indigenous-suited approach⁶⁰ – are denied by simply ignoring the fact of indigenous existence. The 1945 Constitution of Indonesia recognized indigenous peoples' existence in Indonesia. Still Clause 3 of Article 28I provides that "*The cultural identities and rights of traditional communities shall be respected in accordance with the development of times and civilizations.*" However, through Presidential Instruction No. 26 of 1998, the government banned the use of the terms "*indigenous*" and "*non-indigenous*" in all official documents denying the fact of different cultural identities of indigenous peoples and the principles for affirmative action⁶¹. While the indigenous Papuans struggled for their economic, social and cultural rights, their civil and political rights as well as being distinct in cultural terms stemming from a Melanesian background, West Papua has been the scene of egregious human rights violations over the years⁶².

Conversely, the Government of Indonesia has build-up a large military presence in West Papua, far beyond any reasonable security justification or strategic need. This build-up increased the tension in Papuan territory and contributed to the deterioration of the human rights situation, to the high level of impunity particularly when it comes to the involvement of security personnel into the harassment of human rights defenders. According to many studies on the ground, the human rights situation in West Papua has shown no signs of improvement up to November 2007. Human rights violations have rather continued on a routine basis, security personnel instigated against and intimidated human rights defenders, political activists and religious leaders.

Discrimination

Indigenous Papuans are discriminated in terms of systematic marginalization in economic and social life as well as in mental categories being blamed as notoriously being backwarded. While the Government of Indonesia argues that discrimination is prohibited under Law No. 39 of 1999, and thus, by law, there are no violations of ICERD in Indonesia, reports e.g. of the *National Commission on Human Rights* (KPP Komnas HAM) in Jakarta reveal a different reality. This stigmatization often sounds like:

"You have an ugly face with curly hair and a stupid brain"

"You with the curly hair only know how to eat pigs and will never get independence."

"Curly hair is an animal quality and only worthy of annihilation."

"You Papuans do not know anything, even as scholars you are stupid people."

"You people from Wamena sleep with pigs, so you have the brain of a pig, you are all stupid. Better you eat sheep, so you will be as clever as people from Java, Makassar and Jakarta."

"You Papuans are like pigs, dogs."

"You have a brain like a pig."

"Knowing how to raise pigs means to have the brain of a pig."

"If you want to have freedom, take your freedom tonight. Tomorrow there will be no freedom again".

⁶⁰ as Art. 1 of the Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights states; ratified in 1999 through Law Number 29

⁶¹ also provided under the ICERD (International Covenant on Eliminating all Forms of Racial Discrimination)

⁶² Evangelical Church in the Rhineland 2005

Indigenous Papuan people are given the feeling that they are not recognized as human beings, with their own traditions and culture. They are just treated as commodities, objects that can be moved away if needed⁶³.

There are frequent and violent conflicts between Javanese Muslims and the predominantly Christian indigenous peoples in the outlying Islands as in Aceh, Papua, the Maluku, Central Sulawesi, and Central and West Kalimantan⁶⁴. By August 2004, there were 1.3 million internally displaced people estimated, in competition with the *transmigrasis*, the settlers from Java, Bali and Madura, mainly following Islam⁶⁵. According to the Operations Evaluation Department of the World Bank, this led to a “major negative and irreversible impact on indigenous peoples”⁶⁶. Though the Government of Indonesia stopped sponsoring the transmigration program in 2000, it is still the reference point for the nowadays independent migration, and both resulted in a population shift in the urban areas of Papua. The local, indigenous inhabitants have become a minority, forming only one third of the urban population⁶⁷.

In terms of indigenous survival, the State and the Government of Indonesia claim exclusive rights over natural resources at the expense of the rights of the indigenous peoples, not recognising their customary rights (*Adat*); in particular under the Forestry Acts (Act No. 5 of 1967 and Act No. 41 of 1999), Law No. 11 of 1967 on the Principles of Mining, Act No. 5 of 1990 concerning the Conservation of Biological Resources and the Ecosystem and Presidential Regulation No. 36 of 2005 on Land Procurement for Development for Public Purposes. All these provisions deny the *Adat* recognized under Article 3 and Article 5 of the Basic Agrarian Law (BAL) No. 5 of 1960⁶⁸. Consequently, the State and Government of Indonesia does not either fully implement the right of ownership – collective or individual – of the members of indigenous peoples over their lands traditionally occupied by them nor the prior and informed consent of indigenous communities⁶⁹. In addition, provisions in the Special Autonomy Law (see below) require resource companies to pay greater heed to *Adat* claims to land ownership, but they do not apply retroactively to the many companies already in Papua⁷⁰.

Out of the many examples, the case of the Korean-owned firm Korindo and its Indonesian subsidiaries in the Boven Digoel district may be illustrated. Both have been operating in the area since 1993, felling timber for plywood and, from 1997 onwards, moving into oil palm plantations for biofuel production. Less than 10% of the oil palm plantation workers employed by Korindo originated from Papua. Conflicts between the company and Papuan customary land owners are widespread, denying the latter one access and compensation, increasing mistrust between clans over land boundaries and

⁶³ see also Evangelical Church in the Rhineland 2005, contribution of Theo van den Broek

⁶⁴ AITPN 2007: 25ff.

⁶⁵ AITPN 2007: 10, 11

⁶⁶ AITPN 2007: 10, 11; the controversial government-sponsored transmigration ended in 2000.

⁶⁷ UNDP 2005: 6, 12

⁶⁸ AITPN 2007: 13ff.

⁶⁹ meanwhile an established standard at international level: UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples of 2007, ILO Covenant 169 of 1989, standing rule of the Human Rights Court of the Organization of American States

⁷⁰ International Crisis Group (2002): 12ff.

within clans over compensation sharing⁷¹. Additional side-effects are the strong military and police presence, villagers, visitors and local politicians and officials are closely monitored and constantly harassed and intimidated at low-level.

ESC rights

A second area of major concern on human rights relates to the biased access to Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ESC Rights⁷²) systematically disfavours indigenous Papuans compared to non-indigenous Papuans (e.g. transmigrants). Several studies on education, health, housing particularly at the rural side – where indigenous Papuans are still a majority – show the ongoing gap of protection and promotion of these fundamental rights. There are indices stating that indigenous Papuans suffer enforced poverty, poor educational attainment and healthcare, social and demographic changes speeding up the destruction of their special identity and culture. Up to the recent past, natural resources have been rapaciously exploited, which left the indigenous Papuans bereft of a viable infrastructure, prevented them from proper education, health care, vocational training etc. Resettlement sites e.g. in the Timika lowlands to which Oil Companies have relocated hundreds of villagers from the highlands of Bintuni Bay are not fulfilling any standard on proper housing⁷³. In relation to food and nutrition, there is currently a higher exposure to malnutrition risk due to monotonous intake of food at the village level, some areas in the highland are frequently experiencing famine. Other areas are lacking nutritious substances for a balanced diet. The situation is worse for vulnerable groups as pregnant women and children under 5 years⁷⁴.

Education

By quantity, there is an increase in school facilities available all over the province, which might indicate a real progress. The same can be said of the increase in the number of pupils and teachers. While this is true for urban areas, the education opportunities in the interior are on a disastrous low quality level⁷⁵. According to the UNDP report from 2005 Papua has the lowest level of adult literacy in Indonesia (74%). 82% of the Papuan children attend primary school, 47% attend junior secondary school and only 19% senior secondary school. Several factors contribute to the low level of education, for example badly equipped facilities, teachers being absent and lack of access for students due to economic and transportation problems. As the educational system of the state is poor in quality many students turn to private schools.⁷⁶ These schools however face management difficulties, the *Foundation of Christian Education* (YPK) is one example while other good private schools often can not be paid by Papuan families. The constraint on rightly educated Papuans prevents bringing indigenous people in charge and getting them into positions of official authority.

Health

⁷¹ International Crisis Group 2007; further examples are found in Evangelical Church in the Rhineland 2005

⁷² ratified by Law Number 11/2005

⁷³ Evangelical Church in the Rhineland 2005, see the contribution of Agus Sumule

⁷⁴ Evangelical Church in the Rhineland 2007, see the contribution of Agus Sumule in section II

⁷⁵ Evangelical Church in the Rhineland 2005, see the contribution of Theo van den Broek

⁷⁶ UNDP 2005: 22, 23.

The health care situation in Papua still needs very much attention in order to respond to the urgent needs; especially in the interior. According to UNDP, the health situation in Papua is much worse than in other parts of Indonesia in terms of limited health service as the inability to visit particularly rural areas. There, the health care service is below acceptable standards. The life expectancy is at 66.2 (national average: 69), the infant and maternal mortality rates are the highest in Indonesia (maternal mortality rate is 1.116 per 100.000 births). Besides Malaria and Tuberculosis, Papua faces a serious HIV/ Aids problem with the highest infection rate of the country. Until June 2007, 3.377 cases of HIV/Aids were reported, 68% of the infected being local Papuans. UNAIDS has decided to open an office in Jayapura. Similar to the education sector, the facilities of the health sector are poorly equipped, with medical personnel being absent, non-availability of medicine and people from the villages lacking access to health centers due to long distances. Even though health has been identified as a priority sector, only 8% of the provincial budget was allocated for the health sector in 2002 while the city and district governments only allocated 2% of its budget for health⁷⁷.

Economy

The economic development in Papua and the welfare of its indigenous people have to be discussed in relation to the richness of Papua's natural resources. Indigenous Papuans have systematically been denied their rights concerning the natural resources, and, therefore, tend to be marginalized in the development process. Areas with large numbers of non-indigenous settlers such as Jayapura, Merauke, Sorong and Timika have higher HDI ratings than other districts in Papua. The central highlands districts with the highest number of indigenous residents have the lowest HDI rankings⁷⁸. Migrants tend to perform better compared to the indigenous communities, especially in education and competing for job opportunities.

Approximately 5.000 people of Papuan origin and 13.000 from outside Papua are working at the gold and copper mine PT Freeport in Timika. Most of the indigenous Papuans have a non-staff status with little rights. Non-staff employees are for example not allowed to bring their families to live with them in the workers barracks, they are neither allowed to use the restaurants, shopping centres and kiosks owned by PT Freeport nor can their children attend the schools from the multinational company. When indigenous Papuans are employed e.g. in construction work, saw mills, repair shops and furniture business, they normally work for a migrant who is the owner of the business. There are also not many indigenous Papuans who work in the city's supermarkets, hotels or other modern locations. Even in the field of fishing industries, that for long time have been dominated by the indigenous Papuans, they have been slowly moved aside by middlemen or even their whole business have been taken over.

Another example of biased access to the economic sector are the women of Papua selling their fruits and vegetables on the streets in the city of Jayapura. Jayapura is the main capital of Papua and supposed to become a decent and well organized city attracting

⁷⁷ UNDP 2005: 23f., Evangelical Church in the Rhineland 2007, see the contribution of Agus Sumule in section II

⁷⁸ International Crisis Group (2007): 4; UNDP (2004): 109

foreign investors⁷⁹. The Papuan women on the streets are disturbing the picture of an investment orientated city, and the Jayapura city government wants the women to move to the edges of town while the Papuan women ask for a traditional market with proper facilities for them. Similarly, the national development doctrine seeks to make the indigenous Papuans farmers as they are perceived as primitive people and an embarrassment for the Indonesian state. Continuously, development projects are run by non-indigenous Papuans determining in whose hands projects fall⁸⁰.

Special autonomy law

A third area of major concern refers to the biased implementation of the Special Autonomy Law on West Papua. The Special Autonomy Law should devolve control over every policy area but five to Papua: foreign affairs, defence and security, fiscal and monetary policy, religious affairs and justice. It should provide means by which the indigenous Papuans can achieve greater control over their own affairs and generate genuine institutions, procedures and rulings. Properly implemented, it might be a source of empowerment by enabling indigenous Papuans to improve their economic status and social life as well⁸¹.

Article 76 of the Law No. 21 of 2001 (Special Autonomy Law) stipulates that the creation of new provinces in Papua must have the approval of the Papua People's Council (*Majelis Rakyat Papua*; MRP) and the Provincial Legislative Council⁸². Despite that provision, the Government of Indonesia went ahead and divided Papua into two provinces after President Megawati Sukarnoputri passed Presidential Decree No.1 of 2003⁸³. On 16 May 2007 President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono signed the Presidential Decree No. 5/2007 speeding the development of the Province of Papua and the Province of West Papua (West Irian Jaya)⁸⁴ without any prior consultation to or approval with the Papuan institutions.

While the governors of Papua and West Papua are directly elected by all Papuans, and the heads of all 29 districts are indigenous Papuans with political and fiscal authority⁸⁵, the entire process towards autonomy lacks credibility because of the controversial (and illegal) decision to create two provinces. In addition, before the legal status of the new province was resolved, the Indonesian Ministry of Home Affairs authorised elections for the governor there and cemented the *fait accompli*. One of the centrepieces of the Special Autonomy Law in terms of autonomy and indigenous self-determination, the MRP, became rather homeless as it was originally applied to a single entity. Though the MRP holds widespread consultations with its constituency, its legal and real impact is questionable.

⁷⁹ International Crisis Group (2007): 10ff.

⁸⁰ Evangelical Church in the Rhineland 2005, see the contributions of Agus Sumule and Theo van den Broek

⁸¹ for details see Evangelical Church in the Rhineland 2007, sections I, II, and Annex I

⁸² though the Special Autonomy Law was issued in 2001, the MRP came into being only in 2004

⁸³ calling for the division of West Papua into Papua, Central Irian Jaya and West Irian Jaya

⁸⁴ AITPN 2007: 16ff., International Crisis Group 2003, 2006a, 2006b

⁸⁵ In January 2003, the new province of West Irian Jaya was carved out of Papua's western Bird's Head region on the basis of Presidential Instruction 1/2003, which reactivated a 1999 law dividing the province into three. The third province, Central Irian Jaya, was cancelled, while West Irian Jaya went ahead; see International Crisis Group 2003 and 2006a.

Other actors

While the report focuses on the involvement of state entities in the issue of human rights violations, there are additional perpetrators which at least should be named: transnational companies (such as Freeport and BP⁸⁶), private armed groups or ideologically operating groups inspired by Islamic fundamentalism (militia groups). Finally, there is also an undeclared strong opposition – if not war at low intensity – by security personnel of the state against indigenous Papuan culture and its representatives which have been identified in various national and international fact findings.

Nevertheless, the problems in Papua are basically the result of the failures of the Government of Indonesia and its development policies in the area. The Human Rights Council, therefore, should urge the Indonesian government to take serious steps to ensure that Papua gets a just share of the proceeds earned from the exploitation of its abundant natural resources and that the rights of the indigenous Papuan people are duly recognized and economic justice ensured.

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- **Synthesis report of “Living Letters” ecumenical team visit to Indonesia, 17-24 July 2008**

Indonesia is the world’s largest Muslim state with a population of about 241 million. The Muslims comprise about; 86.1%, Protestant 5.7%, Roman Catholic 3% and Hindu 1.8%.

Politically, Indonesia has had a bumpy past. It has been ruled by dictators and military juntas. In 1966 Sukarno who was named president for life was eased out of power by General Suharto who put out an attempted military coup in 1965. The counter reaction to the coup was a violent anti-communist purge that left over half a million people dead. General Suharto was named president in 1968 and ruled Indonesia for 32 years. His regime had been able to contain ethnic, religious and political tensions in the country. The financial crisis in the late 1990’s in East Asia gravely affected Indonesia. This led to popular protests against Suharto. The protests mounted pressure, forcing him to resign in May 1998. The political instability surrounding his resignation led to ethnic and interreligious conflicts in 1999 through to 2001. This was witnessed in; Aceh, Irian Jaya, the Moluccas Islands, Borneo, among other provinces of Indonesia.

It is such situations of conflict that the Decade to Overcome Violence seek to be in solidarity with churches and people in seeking long lasting solutions toward just-peace. Living letters visited Indonesia in 2008. They shared their prayers, thoughts and pledged their ecumenical solidarity with the churches. They learnt the effects of the conflict and the churches interventions and works to restore the interreligious fabric and ensure harmonious coexistence. Like in any conflict the effects were devastating as the Living Letters learnt. Strained Christian-Muslim relations would be an understatement. The conflict left intense hatred between people of these two religions. This was especially in places where there were relatively many Christians. One residence told Living Letters in Ambon that Christian children could not go to the same school as Muslim Students.

Churches and mosques responses

Protestant churches in Ambon (in the Moluccas) established capacity-building and advocacy programmes to promote peace and cooperation between Christians and Muslims. When the Living Letters visited; a ceremony in accordance with the peace programme was organized. It brought together children from the islands of Moluccas. Both Christian and Muslim children were involved. They sang, danced and role played demonstrating their rich traditions and cultures. This is an enriching programme. It does not only help them relax and have fun but also gives them a psychosocial therapy from the consequences of the conflict. It is a child friendly opportunity to grow and interact without prejudices. It is a unique and positive programme for children.

Muslim leaders, whom the team met, kindly shared their efforts of encouraging Muslims to work and live together with Christians in peace as citizens of one nation. Their peace programme at Al Fateh Mosque was inspiring. “The programme is coordinated by Christians and Muslims. They are determined to train young people between 15 – 18 years old, to embrace peace” (*Living Letters’ Indonesia report*) and nurture a strong bond of cordial and friendly relations in future. This is a big step for the community in Ambon, to promote worth interreligious relations. I.E.P.C provides a good forum to share this classic example.

The programme has had a positive impact as witnessed by Weemy Tutuiha, an IDP in one of the camps that the Living Letters visited in Ambon.

Weemy’s brother was killed and his grandfather lost his legs during the conflict. He believes that the Muslim did it and developed a deep hatred for them. Despite the rage, he joined the training and spent 7 days with young people like him who were Muslims. They too lost loved ones. His interactions with his new found friends changed his attitudes towards them and Muslims in general. He is a living testimony of the transformation that the programme is making.

The team met with the Synod Board in Ujung Pandang (Makassar.) The place is predominantly Muslim. During the conflict Christians were mistreated. They were beaten and even thrown out of public transport vehicles. “Nevertheless, the churches unilaterally proceeded to seek reconciliation with Muslims.”

In West Papua, one of the aims of the advocacies and capacity building programmes is to enlighten people to educate their children. Through education, young Papuans will increase their capacities for a better future. At the time of the visit, the World Council of Churches is establishing a youth learning programme for Papuans.

What does this mean for both the International Ecumenical Peace Convocation (IEPC) and the WCC?

- Efforts by WCC support education such as the aforementioned youth learning programme in West Papua are commendable. They continue to enhance relations not only with the churches but also with the people. It is a practical way for W.C.C to “live” the themes of IEPC whose core message is peace. Once majority of people are educated, it will be easier to inculcate peace in the society.
- The IEPC provides a unique platform for the churches to continue harmonizing Christian Muslim relations. The Al Fateh Mosque peace programme is a good example and a worth experience to share. If such initiatives are embraced by a majority of people of the 2 religions, it would help heal many afflictions and mend many divisions. For, there is much that unites people of all religions than divides them. The child friendly programme by the churches that brings together children from both religions compliments the religious efforts of peace. The children in the peace programmes are living testimonies and models of peace. They should be invited well in advance, to perform at the IEPC.

- **Letter of condolence from WCC general secretary to H.E. Dr H. Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono, president of the Republic of Indonesia, offering deep sympathy and prayers to the victims of the earthquake which struck the West Sumatra province, 2 October 2009**

Your Excellency,

We have been deeply saddened by the news of the tragic 7.6 and 6.8 magnitude earthquakes which struck the areas around Padang, the capital of the Western Sumatra province, on 30 September and 1 October, killing more than 1,000 people and destroying hundreds of buildings.

On behalf of the World Council of Churches, I would like to convey our profound and heartfelt condolences to you, Your Excellency, and the people of Indonesia. Please convey our expression of deepest sympathy and solidarity to the grieving families of the victims and all those affected by this calamity.

I would like to assure Your Excellency that, in fully sharing your grief on the tragedy affecting your country, the World Council of Churches is committed and ready to contribute in any possible manner to overcome the catastrophic impact of this natural disaster which quite frequently affects your country and in alleviating the sufferings of the affected victims. The humanitarian aid arm of the ecumenical movement, Action of Churches Together (ACT), has already been operational for two days in the affected areas in Western Sumatra through its members and is providing assistance to the victims. The World Council of Churches and its member churches around the globe will continue to extend all possible humanitarian assistance to the people in affected areas through ACT in the coming days.

During this dreadful period of tragedy that has brought loss of life and suffering to thousands of people in West Sumatra, we assure them of our prayers. We beseech God Almighty to give solace to all those who are mourning and suffering.

Yours sincerely,
Rev. Dr Samuel Kobia
General secretary

Pacific Region

- **Greetings from WCC general secretary to the delegates and participants in the Pacific Conference of Churches' 9th Assembly, 30 August 2007**

Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Grace to you and peace from God, the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ! On behalf of the 347 member churches of the World Council of Churches, I have asked WCC President Dr John Doom, to convey our Christian greetings, our assurance of prayer and our best wishes for a successful 9th Assembly.

In the five years since the Pacific churches and councils last gathered in assembly in Rarotonga, the region has witnessed new challenges to political stability, environmental well-being and economic and cultural autonomy. The past five years have also offered many signs of hope as churches in the Pacific continue to bear witness to the Gospel and work together to address the issues that most concern the peoples of the region.

This assembly is the opportunity to focus the attention of the churches and councils on a common vision of unity and witness, and to coordinate strategies to address the critical issues within the region. Be assured that your sister churches around the world stand ready to accompany you and to express their solidarity in prayer and action.

The fellowship of WCC member churches also looks to this assembly and to the churches and councils in the Pacific for leadership in addressing the critical issues facing our environment, our communities and our ecumenical movement. The urgency to address such issues has never been greater – whether it be climate change and the threats posed to our very way of life; or the preservation of indigenous cultures and the value of inclusive communities where men, women and young people are able to shape together their common future; or to our own understanding of ecumenical formation and what this might mean for a vision of God's people who are empowered to grow, learn and be transformed!

Among the many gifts the Pacific churches have given to the ecumenical movement is the inspiring vision of the 'Island of Hope'. The 9th Assembly of the World Council of Churches, meeting in Porto Alegre in 2006, was encouraged by this vision of life in fullness rooted in faith in Christ and the values of Fenua, handed down from generation to generation. The world has much to learn from the principles of community, kinship and culture that characterize the Pacific 'Island of Hope'.

Indeed, we yearn for God, Atua, to empower us to be liberating communities, so that His glory will be fulfilled. We yearn to be agents of God's transforming presence in the world. We yearn to be signs of Christ's love to all we meet. We yearn for the Holy Spirit to empower us to be prophetic agents in our communities. With God's help, we yearn to share with all people the love and freedom that Christ offers.

May God richly bless your gathering in Kananafou,
Rev. Dr Samuel Kobia

Pakistan

- **Statement on the crisis in Pakistan adopted by the WCC central committee, Geneva, Switzerland, 13-20 February 2008**

1. The people of Pakistan are clamouring for political and social change. In spite of the fact that harassment and repression against people's movements have been intensified, we pray and hope that the people of Pakistan will be able to live in peace and harmony soon so that "they shall all sit under their own vines and under their own fig trees, and no one shall make them afraid" (Micah 4:4).
2. Pakistan is once again passing through an ordeal in its sixty years of independent history. The current crisis in Pakistan revolves around an array of serious problems: mounting violence; suicide attacks; bomb blasts; political repression; blatant violations of human rights; suppression of civil liberties; and the arrest and detention of lawyers, political activists, human rights activists, journalists, and trade unionists who stand for democracy and human rights. Resurgence of religious fundamentalism, the spreading of terror by extremists and cross-border terrorism are intensifying the unrest and ongoing turmoil in Pakistan.
3. Pakistan has been under the military dictatorship of President Pervez Musharraf since the then Prime Minister Nawas Sharief was ousted in October 1999. The current wave of political turmoil in the country started with the declaration of a state of emergency in November 2007 by President Musharraf. The situation is alarming as the nation faces an increase in suicide bombings and kidnappings affecting hundreds of civilians every week. The assassination of Benazir Bhutto on 27 December 2007, a leader who was committed to keeping the Federation of Pakistan together and stood against the military dictatorship, extremism and terrorism, deepened the crisis facing the country.
4. Rule of law is absent in the country. The legal justice system is paralyzed due to the lack of independence of the judiciary and dismissal of the chief justice and other judges. The country-wide judicial crisis has caused a major setback and paralysis of governance, which has in turn affected all areas of life. Arbitrary arrests, detentions and ill-treatment of lawyers; keeping judges and lawyers in continuous detention; and the use of force against protesting lawyers exemplify the fact that the present government has not been committed to resolving the judicial crisis. People's movements calling for reforms, especially the courageous movement of Pakistani lawyers and people, were able to overthrow the decision of the military ruler and restore the chief justice (who had been fired by the military ruler), achieving the upholding of constitutional values for a brief stint. However, the judiciary continues to remain vulnerable and powerless.
5. Even though President Musharraf opted out of his military position, his government continues to lose public support and legitimacy to remain in power. Despite his declining

credibility and legitimacy to rule, the United States' administration continues its support of President Musharraf. Since 11 September 2001, the US military aid to Pakistan and the deepening US involvement in the country have been justified as part of the US "war on terror".

6. The Pakistani military has played an influential role in mainstream politics in Pakistan's history, with army generals ruling from 1958–1971, 1977–1988, and from 1999 onwards. The democratic process in Pakistan has been in peril while the army remains a central player in the politics. The outcome to date of the results of the elections held on 18 February is encouraging, and we very much hope this shows a return to democratic governance in Pakistan.
7. It is heartening that the churches and faith communities in Pakistan have come forward to respond to the deteriorating situation in the country and to condemn the violence, terrorism and all other forms of dehumanizing measures. We believe that human life is a gift of God and any action which threatens life is contrary to the noble values to promote peace, love and forgiveness. All faith communities and civil society groups in Pakistan have a responsibility to their people to respond to the challenge posed by any forces that destroy God's gift of life.

The central committee of the World Council of Churches, meeting in Geneva from 13-20 February 2008, therefore:

- A. **Reiterates** the commitments of the churches to defend human rights, seek justice and promote peace;
- B. **Expresses its solidarity** with the suffering people of Pakistan, especially all those who are bereaved on the loss of their family members;
- C. **Expresses its deep concern** at the deteriorating situation which destroys peace and security and increases conflicts and violence in Pakistani society;
- D. **Expresses its condolences** to the Bhutto family and the people of Pakistan on the assassination of Mrs Benazir Bhutto;
- E. **Welcomes** the election recently concluded in Pakistan and encourages the strengthening and developing of democratic processes in the country;
- F. **Urges** the government of Pakistan to order an independent and impartial inquiry into the circumstances of Mrs Bhutto's death and to bring to justice all those responsible for the heinous crime;
- G. **Calls** for restoration of democracy, civil rights and rule of law in Pakistan, and urges the government of Pakistan to release all political prisoners and human rights activists;

- H. *Calls* on the incoming elected government of Pakistan to ensure the safety and security of all political leaders, human rights activists and minority religious communities in Pakistan;
- I. *Calls* on churches around the world to continue to pray for peace and reconciliation in Pakistan;
- J. *Affirms strongly* the interfaith initiatives by the Church of Pakistan to mobilize non-violent responses to acts of terrorism by building a culture of peace and interfaith harmony in the country;
- K. *Assures* the solidarity of the WCC to its member constituencies in Pakistan in their efforts to work on peace, reconciliation and communal harmony in the country.

- **Letters from WCC general secretary regarding the charges brought against Mr Joseph Francis, Rev. Emmanuel Khokhar and Bishop Samuel Azariah, 20 July 2009**

Letters were sent to:

Mr Syed Yousaf Raza Gillano, prime minister; Mr Asif Ali Zardari, president; Mr Iftikhar Chaudhry, Chief Justice; Makhdoom Shah Mehmood, Foreign Minister; Mr A. Rehman Malik, Interior minister; and the federal minister of Law of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan as well as to Mian Shahbaz Sharif, chief minister of Punjab.

The reason of this letter is to express the concern of the World Council of Churches in relationship to the charges which a particular person by the name of Mr Basharat has made against Mr Joseph Francis, director of the Center for Legal Aid Assistance and Settlement (CLAAS), Rev. Emmanuel Khokhar and Bishop Samuel Azariah. These charges are false.

In fact, Mr Basharat converted back to Islam after marrying a young Christian girl, leaving his pregnant wife and two daughters. Since Bishop Azariah, Mr Joseph Francis and Rev. Emmanuel Khokhar (the parish priest of the Christian girl who eloped) opposed this act of Basharat, he has filed a false and fabricated case against them and has tried to bribe the police and get support from Islamic fundamentalists to support him against the above mentioned three.

Bishop Samuel Azariah is a respected Church leader, being the presiding bishop of the Church of Pakistan and a member of the central and executive committees of the World Council of Churches, besides other international involvements and responsibilities.

Mr Joseph Francis is a committed and faithful citizen who has always worked for the oppressed and marginalized, for peace and justice, for decades and has received

international awards. He is respected internationally both within the Protestant and Roman Catholic churches.

Given the fact that the report to the police, which is the basis for the charges is false, malicious and has no truth whatsoever, we request that this case is dropped.

Yours sincerely,
Rev. Dr Samuel Kobia
General secretary

- **Letter of concern to Mr Asif Ali Zardari, president of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan regarding attacks against Christians in Pakistan, 3 August 2009**

Your Excellency,

I am writing this to bring to your kind attention a matter of serious concern regarding the ongoing attacks against the Christians in the Punjab Province, especially the most recent attack against the Christians in Gojra. It is with great shock and sadness that we received the news that seven people belonging to the Christian community in Gojra were burned alive and forty houses of Christians have been torched by militant Islamic groups, following an intensive and organized attack against the Christian settlements in Gojra Town on the morning of 1 August 2009.

As Your Excellency is aware, this is the third incident of this kind in the last two months in Punjab Province in which settlements of Christian communities were attacked. According to reports we received only a few weeks ago, several houses belonging to Christians were set on fire in Kasur. We have been informed that most victims belong to poor rural folks and security forces are unwilling to take action against the culprits. The killings and destruction of houses could have been avoided if the police and security forces were vigilant and had taken timely action against the militant Islamic groups who constantly threaten the Christian minorities with false allegations of "desecrating the Quran", and try to use the controversial blasphemy laws against them. Various local and international human rights groups and civil society organizations have repeatedly confirmed that the blasphemy laws in Pakistan are being used as an excuse to victimize the minority Christians in your nation. Several innocent Christians who have been charged under these controversial laws continue to languish in jails pending trial.

The Gojra carnage of 1 August, the latest in a series of organized attacks against Christians reconfirms the fear that the government is constantly failing to protect its citizens who frequently face attack by militant Islamic groups. The Federal Minister for Minorities himself stated that there was no truth to allegations that the Holy Quran had been defiled and accused the police of ignoring his appeal to provide protection to Christians under threat in Gojra.

Your Excellency, the World Council of Churches views the Gojra massacre and the riots that took place over the last three days as a matter of serious concern. We believe that it is the responsibility of the State to provide security to all its citizens in the country, particularly in a region where communal tensions and chances for violence run a high risk. We appeal to Your Excellency to take necessary actions against the perpetrators who are responsible for committing grave and unjustifiable attacks against innocent Christian minorities in Gojra. We also appeal to Your Excellency to ensure the safety and security of the victims of the riots. It is our fervent hope and prayer that the situation in Gojra will return to normalcy very soon.

Respectfully yours,
Rev. Dr Samuel Kobia
WCC general secretary

- **Statement on the misuse of the Blasphemy Law and the security of religious minorities in Pakistan, adopted by WCC central committee, Geneva, Switzerland, 26 August–2 September 2009**

1. Conscious of the way that Christians and Muslims have lived in harmony in many times and places, it is with regret that it now seems that the Blasphemy Law in Pakistan has become a major source of victimization and persecution of minorities. Since the penal code of the country was amended in 1986, religious minorities in the country have been living in a state of fear and terror. Under the Blasphemy Law false cases have been brought against religious minorities and Christians in particular have become targets of harassments and persecutions. Due to an increasing trend of the use of the Blasphemy Law, which is often being used as a tool to settle personal scores, attacks on religious minorities have been exacerbated. These incidents have fostered a climate of religiously motivated violence and persecution in several parts of Pakistan. The Blasphemy Law has become a source of friction between the country's majority and minority religious communities.
2. The subject law is part of the penal code of Pakistan. Its Chapter XV deals with offences relating to religion, which contains sections 295 to 298. The Blasphemy Law was originally introduced during the British rule in undivided India in 1860. In 1927, section 295 was added to the penal code to deal with "deliberate and malicious acts intended to outrage religious feelings of any class by insulting its religion or religious belief". Under this provision, protection was given to all religious groups on an equal basis. Conviction depended on proof that the accused deliberately or intentionally acted to injure or insult a person's religious feelings. Since the founding of Pakistan in 1947, for forty years the then existing Blasphemy Law was considered adequate and no government during that period felt the need for any changes until General Zia Ul Haq introduced a number of amendments to the Pakistan penal code at the behest of the Islamic parties in the country. The change in the orientation of the

state's polices introduced by General Zia Ul Haq provided an opening to foster intolerance under the label of blasphemy. Since then, the minority Christians in Pakistan have increasingly become victims of humiliation and persecutions through false allegations made under the Blasphemy Law.

3. The Blasphemy Law, while purporting to protect Islam and religious sensitivities of the Muslim majority, are vaguely formulated and arbitrarily enforced by the police and judiciary in a way which amounts to harassment and persecution. It has become one of the most stringent laws in the country. As the law itself provides only a vague definition of blasphemy, yet blasphemy carries a mandatory death sentence in some cases. There are also serious flaws in the mechanisms to implement the law. Since the mandatory death sentence was introduced as a result of Amendment Act No. III (1986) to section 295C, many innocent people have lost their lives. In several cases, accused persons have not been brought to trial. Many victims of the Blasphemy Law have had to seek asylum in countries abroad for their security and others are forced to live in hiding.
4. The major flaw in the practice and implementation of the Blasphemy Law today is that on the testimony of a complainant, a person charged with blasphemy is immediately placed in detention. The penalty includes a mandatory death sentence for defaming the Prophet Mohammad and life imprisonment for desecrating the Holy Quran. Under the provisions of the present law, conviction is made possible without proof of deliberate attempt on the part of the accused. This is a violation of the fundamental rights guaranteed by the constitution of Pakistan. The common experience of abusing and misusing of the Blasphemy Law in Pakistan has led to physical violence, damage, destruction of properties and loss of life within the innocent Christian minority over the years. It has been reported, for instance, that between 1988 and 2005, the authorities in Pakistan charged 647 people under the Blasphemy Law. In recent times, the number has been increasing. Human rights groups observed that charges brought against individuals under the Blasphemy Law are founded solely on the individual's minority religious beliefs or unfounded malicious accusations stemming from personal enmity, often with the motivation to have people imprisoned to gain advantage in business or land disputes. It has been reported that the judiciary also faces threats, intimidation and pressure. As a result of this, the lower courts have often been constrained to convict persons without proper study of the evidence placed before them. It is increasingly becoming difficult to obtain a fair hearing in Pakistan for those charged under the Blasphemy Law.
5. The World Council of Churches (WCC) has followed with concern the killings of Christians in Gojra and other places in the state of Punjab in the past weeks. Recalling the assurances given to the religious minorities by Mohammed Ali Jinnah, the founder of Pakistan, that "minorities are a sacred trust of Pakistan", the WCC believes that the discrimination and attacks targeted against religious minorities in Pakistan are in violation of Article 36 of the Constitution of Pakistan that guarantees the legitimate rights of minorities. As the increasing trend of the misuse of Blasphemy Law intensifies communal hatred, religious intolerance and persecution against religious minorities, in this context the WCC expresses its serious concern on

section 295C of the Pakistan penal code which carries a mandatory death penalty for anyone found guilty of blasphemy.

The central committee of the WCC, meeting in Geneva, 26 August – 2 September 2009, therefore:

- A. *Urges* the government of Pakistan to repeal the section 295C of the Pakistan penal code which carries a mandatory death penalty for anyone found guilty of blasphemy.
- B. *Calls* upon the government of Pakistan to guarantee the rights of all religious minorities in the country.
- C. *Expresses* solidarity with the Christians and all other religious minorities in Pakistan.
- D. *Encourages* WCC member churches to request their respective governments to write to the government of Pakistan and express their concerns on the security of religious minorities in Pakistan and also to *request* that misuse of the Blasphemy Law be stopped.
- E. *Calls* upon WCC member churches to pray for the people of Pakistan and that peace and security will prevail throughout Pakistan.

People's Republic of China

- **Letter from WCC general secretary to H.E. Hu Jintao, president of the People's Republic of China, expressing condolences at the deaths and wide- scale damage following the earthquake in Sichuan Province, 21 May 2008**

Your Excellency,

It was with great sadness that we received the news about the disastrous earthquake which struck the Sichuan Province in China last week and which claimed thousands of lives, and razed houses, schools, roads and bridges. On behalf of the World Council of Churches (WCC) and our members around the world, I express our most sincere condolences to you, your government, family members of the victims and the entire Chinese people who mourn and grieve over the loss of thousands of lives and the missing of numerous people due to the natural disaster.

Your Excellency, while your country and people are experiencing such pain and ordeal at this time of a national crisis, I assure you that the WCC is committed to join hands with the people of China in their efforts to reduce and alleviate the sufferings of the affected victims in the Sichuan Province. Ever since the news about the earthquake was reported, we have been in touch with our friends and colleagues at the China Christian Council (CCC) and the Amity Foundation. We came to know that both CCC and the Amity Foundation have immediately joined with the local governments, Sichuan Christian Council and other partners in the affected areas in relief and rehabilitation efforts. The

humanitarian aid arm of the WCC and its member churches, Action by Churches Together (ACT) here in Geneva began a process to mobilize its members in various countries to extend all possible assistance to the people in affected areas in the coming days through its member, the Amity Foundation.

It was heartening to know of the success of the immediate rescue and relief operations undertaken by the Government of the People's Republic of China and various other organizations. It is my earnest prayer and hope that these efforts will reduce the sufferings of the affected people.

Your Excellency, at this hour of grief and mourning in your country, I want to assure you that the thoughts and solidarity of millions of WCC members from around the world will accompany you and the people of China.

Yours sincerely,
Rev. Dr Samuel Kobia
General secretary

cc: China Christian Council, Shanghai
Amity Foundation, Nanjing

Philippines

- **Expression of concern by WCC general secretary regarding the worsening human rights situation in the Philippines, Manila, Philippines, 21 November 2007**

The World Council of Churches (WCC) has been following and monitoring the situation in the Philippines for more than three decades. Over the years the WCC has been accompanying its member churches and the member Council – NCCP in their efforts to ensure justice and peace, protection of human rights and human dignity of the people of the Republic of the Philippines. The WCC has been deeply concerned on the deteriorating situation in the Philippines in all these years. From time to time, we conveyed our concerns to the respective bodies and authorities, and we voiced our concerns on several occasions about the worsening human rights situation in the country.

The central committee of the WCC which is a representative governing body of the global ecumenical fellowship with high profile leaders belong to its member constituency from different parts of the world in its last meeting held in Geneva in September 2006 devoted time to discuss once again about the deteriorating human rights situation in the Philippines. The members of the WCC central committee unequivocally condemned the extra-judicial killings in the Philippines and expressed grave concerns on the increasing militarization.

I have been meeting with various people and organizations in the country during the past four days along with a team of ecumenical delegates from different countries – Australia, Canada, Ghana, India, Japan, Korea and Thailand, We heard about the escalating fear and anxiety of people from different quarters that the situation will exacerbate with the implementation of the Human Security Act (HSA) enacted in July this year. I heard stories about how paramilitary groups armed by the military, and even members of the military and police have been involved and implicated in human rights violations especially in extrajudicial killings. During my meetings, it was shared that the government has increased its military action against insurgents resulting in an increase in the number of civilian deaths. As militarization in the Philippines has been on the increase the fear of the people are deepening. This fear of the people supported with my own information about the killings of several church workers and pastors in recent months including the brutal stabbing of Philippines Independent Church bishop Alberto Ramento in October last year.

As the WCC central committee has expressed its grave concern on the alarming human rights situation in the country, I reiterate some of our concerns expressed and the Appeal, we made to the Philippines government that:

- An immediate and impartial investigation of all recent extrajudicial executions. We have been following the Report of the U.N special rapporteur Philip Alston and his observation that the "governments measures don't address the fact that the brutal killings are encouraged or facilitated by certain aspects of its own counter insurgency strategy". It is in this context we also share the concern and appeal to the government of the Philippines expressed by the churches in the country that an independent inquiry commission to be set up to investigate the extrajudicial killings rather than one made up of the government appointees. At the same time, we hope not only for an investigation but to put an END to Extrajudicial killings.
- Our call is not to use the militarist approach in solving the problems – not just revising the military strategy for resolving the insurgency, but to ensure the resumption of the stalled peace talks between the government of the Republic of the Philippines and the National Democratic Front. In order to solve the insurgency, the government should address the root causes of the problems in the country, especially the long awaited land reforms and poverty alleviation which will lift up millions of Filipino masses who are struggling in their day to day life for freedom from hunger and poverty.
- It is our considered opinion that the Philippine government should take necessary action to stop the Enforced Disappearances in the country and the government should fulfill its obligations under the international human rights instruments and take immediate initiatives to ratify the International Convention of Protection of All Persons from enforced Disappearances.
- It seemed that the Philippines government is resorting to terrorist means in conducting its "war on terror". The Human Security Act (HSA) took effect recently, under the pretext of countering terrorism in the country or "war on

terror", could have a negative impact in the Philippines society as many of its provisions are not in accordance with international human rights standards. As HSA defined terrorism broadly, it gives justification to put forth legal procedures and punishments for people branded as 'enemies of the state'.

- We condemn the ongoing practice of the Philippine government and the military of labeling and persecuting the churches, pastors and church workers who work for justice, peace and protection of human rights as subversives or communists.

While we reiterate our commitment to accompany the churches in the Philippines in their ongoing struggle for justice, peace and protection of human rights of all Filipinos, we assured the churches and the NCCP who stand with the poor and marginalized in their struggle that we will continue to be engaged in our global advocacy on Philippines human rights situation at all levels in the international arena.

During my recent meeting with the secretary general of the U.N at its headquarters in New York, I openly appealed to the U.N secretary general for his intervention in the precarious situation of the extra judicial killings in the Philippines. The WCC has a consultative status with the UN ECOSOC and in that capacity, we attend, monitor and participate in the discussions and debates at the U.N. bodies and also we accredit representatives from our constituencies to the UN Human Rights Council. While we continue this effort in collaboration and cooperation with other ecumenical organizations in WCC constituency and networks around the globe, WCC will continue to call the intervention of the HRC to look into the escalating human rights violations in the Philippines and this will be a priority engagement of WCC in the coming months. WCC will facilitate to present the cases of the human rights abuses in the country when the Philippines situation will be reviewed by the UN Human Rights Council in early 2008 through the new mechanism of the UNHRC – the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) process.

Again, I reiterate our commitment that the global ecumenical movement will continue to be in solidarity with the struggling Filipinos and their churches who are engaged in the ministries of prophetic witness and struggle for the marginalized and the poor.

- **UN Human Rights Council, general debate on item 3: Report of the special rapporteur on human rights defenders, 7th session, 13 March 2008**

Oral Intervention by the International Association of Democratic Lawyers (IADL)

Supported by the World Council of Churches (WCC), Lawyers Rights Watch of Canada (LRWC), Asian Legal Resource Center (ALRC), Asian Indigenous and Tribal Peoples Network (AITPN), Indigenous Peoples' Coalition (IPC), Nord Sud XXI

Thank you, Mr President:

I am speaking on behalf of the International Association of Democratic Lawyers (IADL). This statement is joined by the World Council of Churches (WCC), Lawyers Rights Watch of Canada (LRWC), Asian Legal Resource Center (ALRC), Asian Indigenous and Tribal Peoples Network (AITPN), Indigenous Peoples' Coalition (IPC), Nord Sud XXI, as well as the Dutch Lawyers for Lawyers Foundation.

I come from the Filipino lawyers' groups National Union of Peoples' Lawyers (NUPL) and the Counsels for the Defense of Liberties (CODAL).

We wish to address the issue of human rights defenders and would like to take the opportunity to commend once again Ms Hina Jilani, special representative of the secretary general, for her report and salute her for her exemplary and courageous work. We welcome the report particularly on the role of stakeholders in implementing its recommendations.

The addendum mentioned the extrajudicial killing of human rights lawyer Gil Gojol who was killed after coming from a court hearing and of the surveillance of the ProLabor Legal Assistance Center (PLACE) which provides free legal aid to workers.

These attacks violate the 1966 International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the 1990 Basic Principles on the Role of Lawyers and the 1998 UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders.

These attacks are emblematic of the continuing attacks not only against lawyers – a significant number of whom are involved directly in human rights lawyering and advocacy. These are also but part of the impunity of the attacks against hundreds of other human rights defenders – human rights workers, peasant organizers, trade unionists, churchpeople and others – within the context of a militarist counter-insurgency approach ironically called Oplan Bantay Laya (Operation Plan Freedom Watch). Suffice it to say that until today, no one has ever been credibly convicted for these attacks.

In addition, the special representative correctly pointed out that the attacks may have been related to activities in the defense of human rights. As a foreign lawyer once quipped in shock over the level of impunity, these attacks may indicate that “the Philippines is the worst place for human rights defenders to be.”

Further, these cases are incompatible with the Philippines' pledges as a member of the Council. In this connection, the Permanent Peoples' Tribunal (PPT) 2nd Session on the Philippines views as “unacceptable” the inclusion of the Philippine government as a member of the Council because “it undermines the credibility of the UN in this field; is an intolerable offense to the victims; and is a denial of the many well documented denunciations of the dramatic violations of human rights.”

Finally, the special representative observed that the high incidence of forced disappearances and extrajudicial killings of human rights defenders in the Philippines remains a deep concern and that the absence of any credible investigation and resolution of cases may indicate that “human rights defenders in the Philippines are unable to fully carry out their work due to fear of intimidation and reprisal.” Even foreign human rights defenders – prominent personalities, lawyers, church workers, trade unionists, social workers, doctors – have been placed on the government’s immigration “blacklist/watchlist” for their positions and involvement against human rights violations.

We fully support the recommendation of the special representative that the situation of human rights defenders be one of the elements to be examined in the upcoming Universal Periodic Review (UPR).

We request the Human Rights Council to fully support the mandate on Human Rights defenders and encourage the mandate holder to continue the struggle of the people on the ground for the promotion and protection of human rights worldwide.

Thank you, Mr President.

- **Oral intervention at the 8th session of the Human Rights Council interactive dialogue on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions, 3 June 2008**

This is a joint statement by the World Council of Churches (WCC), the International Association of Democratic Lawyers (IADL), the Asian Legal Resource Center (ALRC), and the Philippine NGO delegation.

Mr President, we take this occasion to thank Professor Alston for his meticulous research and intensive study of the documents, interviews and evidence he was able to gather in his mission to the Philippines to look into the spate of extrajudicial killings that have and continue to plague our country. We commend and fully support his findings during his 10 day-investigative mission.

Prof. Alston concluded that "two underlying causes are the reasons behind these killings: a counter-insurgency program being carried out by the administration, and no convictions being made against perpetrators."

Indeed, Prof. Alston in his report correctly and succinctly concluded that state security forces have been involved in many of the killings of left-wing activists, indigenous leaders, trade union and farmer leaders and civil society organization members and that the military remains in a "state of denial" over these killings.

This conclusion of a UN special mandate-holder does not speak well of a member of this august Council that is supposed to set the highest standards of human rights promotion

and protection among the members states, and has in fact, pledged voluntarily to maintain and practice such standards.

One year after the abduction and disappearance of Jonas Burgos, an activist denied by the military to be under their custody, Dr Edita Burgos, his mother, who is here again with our NGO delegation for this session, is still looking for her son.

Mr President, may we know from the special rapporteur if there have been any indications from the Philippine government if changes have been made in the counter-insurgency program it is implementing since this is one of the reasons that engenders the killings and other human rights violations? May we know what the government response is to his recommendations of abolishing the IALAG? We are interested to know of the response of the government to the special rapporteur's recommendations in general.

May we also know what steps have been taken on the case of the witness to the special rapporteur who was killed after giving her testimony?

Mr President, this year alone, our organization has already documented a total of 13 victims of extrajudicial killings and two victims of enforced disappearances and many victims of abductions. Reports of military abuses have already displaced thousands of villagers in Mindanao, Samar, Quezon and Negros islands, as well as other forms of violations happening in the militarized areas.

Human rights defenders who document these cases have received heightened threats and harassments. The labelling as "communist fronts" of civil society organizations by military and other government agencies, which Prof. Alston recommended that it stop, continues nonetheless to this day.

Mr President, during the Philippine UPR, the government had reported of measures to address the killings. However, up to now we have yet to see a perpetrator convicted and punished for the crime. The enumerated measures, we feel, will not solve the problem unless the counter-insurgency policy changes and the other recommendations made by the special rapporteur are seriously carried out.

Further, may we know what the Council will do to ensure that our government will work in cooperation with the special rapporteur to implement the recommendations Prof. Alston has drawn up?

We urge this body to thoroughly review the record of the Philippine state in upholding the rights of its citizens. Let not the cries for justice of the victims of extrajudicial killings, enforced disappearances, torture and other human rights violations fall on deaf ears and exacerbate the conflict in the land. For it is when looking the other way while human rights violations are committed and not doing anything to correct them that our own humanity is eroded and justice becomes a mockery.

We reiterate our call for this body to keep pursuing our government to stop the extrajudicial killings and other human rights violations by adopting and genuinely carrying out the recommendations of Prof. Alston. We exhort this body to show more resolve in truly and effectively putting to task its members in upholding and respecting the rights of its own people.

Thank you, Mr President.

- **Oral Intervention at the UN Human Rights Council 8th Session, Item 6: Consideration of UPR Reports – Philippines, 10 June 2008**

Joint Statement on behalf of the Commission of Churches on International Affairs of the World Council of Churches (CCIA WCC) and the International Association of Democratic Lawyers (IADL)

Mr President:

We thank the World Council of Churches' Commission of Churches on International Affairs (WCC CCIA) and the International Association of Democratic Lawyers (IADL) for their support to this statement.

We also take this opportunity to thank the States that raised serious questions and recommendations during the UPR on the Philippines in April. The continuing concern of the international community on extrajudicial killings and other human rights violations in the Philippines is reassuring. Such concern dispelled the glossy picture projected by the Philippine National Report through its reporting of formal recognition of basic rights and

In the outcome of the review, it was stated that the preparation of the Report was done through a supposed "consultative and participatory process" to fulfil the Government's pledge of "promoting constructive engagement of the Council with civil society, ensuring opportunities to gainfully contribute to the work of the Council." We maintain that much leaves to be desired in such a process.

In relation to the outcome of the review, we note that the Philippine delegation did not indicate any adoption of the recommendations of the special rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary execution especially on the changes in the counter-insurgency program being implemented by the state and which the special rapporteur noted as one of the causes of the killings and disappearances. The filing of cases in some and the conviction of four persons among almost a thousand cases do not negate the fact that not a single military person was convicted of such violations largely attributed to the militarist approach of the Government to the issue of counterinsurgency in the Philippines.

The reduction in the number of victims of killings is the result of public outcry and

international outrage. Yet, the impunity continues. A recent case is that of Pastor Rodel Canja who was abducted and subjected to mental torture in an attempt to force him to declare his colleague, Pastor Berlin Guerrero, abducted one year earlier and now detained on false charges, as a member of the communist party. More than a year after my son's abduction, in spite of all legal remedies availed of, including the much-vaunted new remedy of the writ of amparo, I am still searching for my disappeared son, Jonas.

Mr President, in the outcome of the review the Philippine delegation declared one of its commitments is to "maintain the momentum on addressing killings of activists and media professionals."

May we know what momentum is it saying and what actions it envisions to totally address the issue of killings and disappearances?

We respectfully urge this august body to encourage the Philippines to abide by its pledges and commitments and implement the recommendations of the special rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions.

Thank you, Mr President.

- **Testimony of Rev. Berlin Guerrero of the United Church of Christ in the Philippines before the United Nations Committee against Torture 42nd session, 27 April 2009**

A pastor testifies he was tortured in the Philippines

Claims made by the Philippines government to a good human rights track record "are utterly false", Rev. Berlin Guerrero told the United Nations Committee against Torture this week. A victim of torture himself, Guerrero said the government of Gloria Macapagal Arroyo is "remiss in its responsibility to prevent torture".

A pastor of the United Church of Christ in the Philippines, Guerrero stated that "church people have not been spared from torture". "Most of the victims of torture among church people are from member churches of the National Council of Churches in the Philippines, and I am one of those who have been victimized," he said.

According to the human rights group Karapatan (Alliance for the Advancement of People's Rights), between 2001 and 2008 there were 1,010 documented victims of torture in the Philippines. Extra judicial killings over the same period amounted to 991.

Guerrero spoke before the 42nd session of the UN Committee against Torture meeting in Geneva, Switzerland this week to review the human rights record of Philippines and other countries. He was sponsored by the World Council of Churches (WCC) Commission of the Churches in International Affairs.

Guerrero was abducted on 27 May 2007 in front of his family, soon after Sunday worship at the local UCCP church in Malaban, Biñan. "No warrant of arrest was shown despite our pleas and protests," he recalled in his statement to the UN committee.

After "one year, three months and 15 days", he was released because of the "insufficiency of evidence" against him. "To experience this kind of persecution strengthened and confirmed my faith," he says. "While in detention I was happy to be able to serve the prison community by starting a Christian ministry to my fellow detainees."

When he visited the WCC offices in Geneva on 28 April, Guerrero was welcomed by WCC General Secretary Rev. Dr Samuel Kobia. During a visit to the Philippines in November 2007 at the helm of an international delegation, Kobia had joined the campaign for Guerrero's liberation, publicly calling for his release.

According to Guerrero, thanks to an international campaign in which churches have played a crucial role, the extra judicial executions in the Philippines have decreased. But "with general elections scheduled for 2010 they are peaking again, with a rate of one person killed every week," he says.

"The WCC will continue supporting the efforts of human rights defenders in the Philippines," Kobia told Guerrero, who was accompanied by Karapatan General Secretary Marie Hilao-Enriquez, and by Raymond Manalo, another torture victim.

A farmer's ordeal

Manalo, a 27-year old farmer in San Idefonso, in the northern province of Bulacan, was abducted together with his brother Reynaldo on 14 February 2006. He was held for 18 months in three different secret detention facilities within military camps.

"The soldiers beat us with pieces of wood on our backs and different parts of our bodies, beat us with chains, burn different parts of our bodies with cigarettes and heated metal tin, kicked us with their combat boots on, hit us with the butts of their rifles, poured gasoline on my waist and legs while threatening to burn me," Manalo told the UN committee.

He witnessed "soldiers summarily killing civilians whom they accused of being rebels or aiding them" as well as other captives being tortured. After admitting to his captors' accusations, the torture was eased and he entered a slave work regime.

Manalo escaped with his brother in August 2007. With help from human rights organizations he was able to obtain a writ of *amparo* – a legal remedy for victims of extrajudicial killings or enforced disappearances – and in September 2008 filed criminal complaints against members of the military he was able to identify amongst his torturers.

"I do not want this ordeal to happen to anybody else. I wish that the extrajudicial killings, disappearances and torture in my country will stop [...] I hope that President Gloria Arroyo will end the impunity," Manalo told the UN committee.

- **Letter from WCC general secretary to the general secretaries of WCC member churches in the Philippines and the NCCP offering heartfelt condolences to the families of victims affected by Typhoon Ketzana, 2 October 2009**

Sisters in Christ,

It is with great distress that we received the news of the devastating Typhoon Ketzana that wreaked havoc in the capital Manila and two northern provinces, Rizal and Pampanga of the Philippines, leaving more than 300 people dead, several missing and hundreds of thousands of people displaced.

On behalf of the World Council of Churches, I would like to convey our heartfelt condolences and deep sympathy for the families of victims and all others affected. We assure them of our prayers and beseech God Almighty to give comfort and consolation to all those who are mourning and suffering. We also pray for those burdened by unimaginable losses and who have found themselves like refugees in their own locality.

It is heartening to know that the National Council of Churches in the Philippines (NCCP), through its member churches and regional ecumenical councils in the affected areas has been involved in relief efforts; local congregations have been opening their premises as evacuation and relief centres. We commend you on the care you are providing to the needy in times of their distress. We do hope that gestures of practical solidarity, as well as the emotional and spiritual support already offered by local communities from around the world, will encourage and lift the spirits of those affected. As you know, the World Council of Churches and its member churches from different parts of the world, are committed to take part in your efforts to overcome the catastrophic impact of this natural disaster and reduce the suffering of the affected people. I am informed that the humanitarian aid arm of the ecumenical movement, Action of Churches Together (ACT), is extending all possible support through its members in the Philippines in the affected areas.

We are aware that the days ahead will be very demanding for churches in the Philippines. However, we trust in God and in human resilience and kindness. At this time of distress and sense of loss, let our deep trust in God Almighty strengthen us one another and help us to go forward in faith. Let us continue to pray and affirm our faith in His divine grace and healing presence:

“Though you have made me see troubles, many and bitter, you will restore my life again; from the depths of the earth you will again bring me up. (Psalm 71:20)

Yours in Christ
Rev. Dr Samuel Kobia
General secretary

Republic of Korea

- **Letter from WCC acting general secretary to Rev. Oh-sung Kwon, general secretary of NCKK, regarding Korean hostages held in Afghanistan, 24 July 2007**

Dear Rev. Oh-sung Kwon,

On behalf of the fellowship of WCC member churches, please be assured that we are praying in earnest for the 23 Koreans who are held hostage in Afghanistan. Their abduction on 19 July and the pending threat of their execution have shocked many people around the world.

As negotiations between the Taliban and the South Korean government continue, we pray for the immediate release of those being held, for their reunion with their families and for true peace in Afghanistan. We pray also for the Afghan President Hamid Karzai, that through his help, negotiations may be strengthened.

We are calling the entire ecumenical family to join in prayer, asking God to intercede so that the hostages will be released and brought to safety.

We stand in solidarity with the families and churches affected, and with all the Korean people as they live through this difficult and trying time.

Yours in Christ,
William Temu
Acting general secretary

- **Meeting of WCC general secretary with families of the Korean Christian humanitarian workers being held by the Taliban in Afghanistan, 14 August 2007**

In a gesture of support toward the families of the Korean hostages being held by the Taliban in Afghanistan, Rev. Dr Samuel Kobia, general secretary of the World Council of Churches (WCC), visited the families while on a trip to Korea.

Of the 23 Christian humanitarian workers who were taken hostage on 19 July, two have been killed by their captors, while two others were released yesterday into the care of the international Red Cross and Red Crescent societies.

During the 40-minute meeting, which was held at the Saemmul Community Church in Bundang near Seoul, Dr Kobia told the families that "the prayers of millions of Christians around the world" were being offered for the speedy and safe release of the hostages.

The visit was pastoral, and Kobia did not engage the group in details about the hostage situation.

"Their pain is our pain; their tears are our tears," Kobia said in a phone interview from Korea shortly after the meeting.

"You could see their pain and agony. It was written all over their faces," he said of the families. "It was a very moving moment for me."

"I told them they have now become part of a bigger family, and they can feel they now have a global family holding them up in prayer," he said.

Kobia was accompanied by the Rev. Kwon Oh-sung, the general secretary of the National Council of Churches in Korea, and Jung Hae-sun, a member of the WCC executive committee and central committee.

During the meeting Kobia expressed the hope that "our world will become the kind of world where human beings can express support of other human beings, without our acts of charity being viewed with suspicion."

Members of the hostages' families are meeting at the church on a daily basis, Kobia said, arriving in the morning and often staying until 10 p.m.

While at the church, more than 30 other people, many young people, assist the families by cooking meals and offering "mutual support and encouragement," he added.

National and international media were at the church and met with Kobia at the close of his visit, but at the request of the families no public media were allowed in their meeting with him.

Kobia met the hostages' families at the end of a weeklong trip to Korea where he attended two pre-planned conferences, one celebrating the 100th anniversary of the great revival of 1907 and the other examining the continuing role of the Korean churches in the reunification of the Korean peninsula.

- **Letter to the general secretary of NCKK on the release of the Korean hostages held in Afghanistan, 31 August 2007**

*“Light dawns for the righteous, and joy for the upright in heart.”
(Psalm 97:11)*

Having engaged in a season of prayer for the Korean hostages during their captivity, and having joined you in visiting and praying with members of their families in Bundang on August 14, 2007, I receive the news of their return to the Sammul Community Church with gratitude to God and admiration for those who contributed to their liberation from captivity. May the success of the contacts and dialogue that led to their safe release provide encouragement to peace-makers in troubled regions everywhere.

I am writing to express my joy and thanksgiving for the 21 church-related humanitarian workers whose lives have been spared in Afghanistan. Of equal importance, I write to assure the whole community, and especially the families and friends of the two hostages who lost their lives, of continued prayer and concern on the part of Christians in every part of the world.

The apostle Paul, who had personal experience of both joy and sorrow, understood that our hope in Christ often co-exists with great human sacrifice. As he wrote to the church at Philippi, “But even if I am being poured out as a libation over the sacrifice and the offering of your faith, I am glad and rejoice with all of you – and in the same way you also must be glad and rejoice with me” (*Philippians 2:17-18*).

With people and churches around the globe, I wish for you and the churches of Korea the sure and certain hope of the resurrection that brings comfort to those who mourn, hope to all and renewed dedication to our common pursuit of unity, witness and service in this world.

Samuel Kobia
General secretary

- **Letter from WCC general secretary to Mr Lee Myung-bak, president of the Republic of Korea expressing concern at the shift in South Korean policy with regards to North Korea, 1 July 2008**

Your Excellency,

The World Council of Churches is greatly encouraged by the recent progress that has been made in multilateral efforts to end North Korea’s nuclear weapons programmes. The decision of the North Korean government to submit an inventory of nuclear plants and

materials and subsequently the demolition of the cooling tower in the nuclear complex at Yongbyong, are clear indications that the six party-talks have proceeded a step further.

It is also heartening to receive the news that the United States administration is lifting sanctions against North Korea and removing the country from its list of countries that sponsor terrorism. These signs encourage us to believe that the steps taken by the various parties as agreed in the six-party talks will pave the way for overcoming the remaining obstacles to completing negotiations aimed at ending North Korea's nuclear programme. In fact, these developments are important progresses towards the ultimate goal of the denuclearization of the Korean peninsula. This recent development needs to be seen, both politically and symbolically, as North Korea's clear commitment to dismantling its nuclear programme in the near future.

While congratulating all those who have been involved in the six-party talks on their efforts in leading the process through multilateral diplomacy, Your Excellency, I would urge you to take urgent measures to strengthen inter-Korean relationships without any pre-conditions being demanded by your government.

The World Council of Churches has been monitoring the situation on the Korean Peninsula for the past several decades. The “engagement policy” with its emphasis on “reconciliation and cooperation, peace and co-prosperity” initiated by the leadership of two successive South Korean governments contributed to the easing of tensions in the Korean Peninsula. The policy and dynamics of inter-Korean cooperation developed by South Korea during the past decade have made unprecedented progress in inter-Korean relations and have helped to generate important confidence-building measures. However, the new South Korean government’s policy towards North Korea reflected in your inaugural speech of “Denuclearization, Opening and Vision 3000” is cause for concern and disappointment as it negates the spirit of the joint declarations made by the two Koreas in the recent past.

Your Excellency, we see this shift in South Korea’s policy toward North Korea as potentially hindering the efforts for peace and reunification on the Korean Peninsula. It is in this context, on behalf of the World Council of Churches and its member constituencies all over the world, that I urge you to take all possible measures to avoid any deterioration of inter-Korean relations.

The WCC member constituencies in South Korea have already expressed their concerns on this recent policy development, which is being promoted by your administration. The World Council of Churches shares the concerns expressed by the South Korean churches about your government’s policies on North Korea, and we urge you to respond creatively to the positive gesture demonstrated by the North Korean government last week.

It is our sincere hope, Your Excellency, that your government will soon devise a policy framework that could make qualitative improvements in North-South Korea relations and thereby promote lasting peace and security on the Korean Peninsula. The World Council of Churches has repeatedly reaffirmed our support for the UN initiatives to eliminate all

nuclear arms and the full terms of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT). At the same time we have joined the people praying and yearning for the reunification of the Korean Peninsula. In 2004, the World Council of Churches' executive committee offered the following prayer:

*We cry to you out of the depths of despair over the division of Korea,
Which is the victim of a divided world.
You came to this world as a Servant of Peace,
You provide love and peace.
You commanded us to love each other...
You have given us signs of hope in the midst of despair.*

I end with these words of intercession said during the World Day of Prayer for Peace, while I assure Your Excellency of our continued solidarity in all the efforts towards a unified, reconciled and peaceful Korea.

Yours sincerely,
Rev. Dr Samuel Kobia
General secretary

- **Letter from WCC general secretary to member churches in South Korea, the National Council of Churches in Korea and the Korean Christian Federation informing them of the letter sent by the WCC to the president of the Republic of Korea, 1 July 2008**

Dear ecumenical friends:

Greetings from the World Council of Churches.

I am pleased to share with you herewith attached a copy of my letter to the President of the Republic of Korea. On the request of the general secretary of the NCC Korea and suggested by the Steering Committee of the Ecumenical Forum for Peace, Reunification and Development Cooperation on the Korean Peninsula, which is coordinated and chaired by the WCC, I have conveyed the ecumenical family's concern on the new South Korean government's policy towards North Korea.

As usual we have been following the trends and events on the Korean Peninsula and are concerned about the shift in the South Korean government's policy towards North Korea which was announced by President Lee Myung-bak in his inaugural address "Denuclearization, Opening and Vision 3000". At the same time, North Korea's declaration last week of the dismantling of its nuclear programme gives us hopeful signs. I am sure it will be a very important step in the 'disablement process', and this new

development will encourage all those who are involved in the six-party talks and put them in a good position to move into the next phase.

As Prophet Micah said, let us hope that “they shall all sit under their own vines and under their own fig trees, and no one shall make them afraid” (Micah 4:4 RSV). Let this be our continued prayer and hope for the emergence of a reconciled and reunified Korea soon, where lasting peace and security of all are ensured.

Yours in His Service,
Rev. Dr Samuel Kobia
General secretary

- **Letter of condolence from WCC general secretary to Dr Whi Ho Lee, general secretary of NCKK, on the death of Mr Kim Dae-jung, former president of South Korea, 18 August 2009**

Dear Dr Whi Ho Lee,

It is with great sadness that the World Council of Churches (WCC) received the news that Mr Kim Dae-jung, former president of South Korea, has passed away. We join you, your sons, family, and the Korean people in thanking God for his life and leadership.

An ardent advocate of democratization and human rights in Korea, Kim Dae-jung demonstrated clear vision and courage while he was fighting tenaciously for greater political freedom in his country despite the authoritarian rule of repressive regimes in South Korea during the 1970s and 1980s. He was instrumental in strengthening the democratization movement in South Korea until the country was transformed into a full-fledged democracy. President Kim will be remembered as the architect of the "Sunshine Policy" engaging communist North Korea, which led to an unprecedented warming of ties among Koreans and advanced the unification process. His determined efforts made him a deserving recipient of the Nobel Prize for Peace. His untiring efforts and long-standing commitment to achieve democratization and inter-Korean reconciliation will long be honoured by people within Korea and all over the world.

Mr Kim Dae-jung was associated with the World Council of Churches while he was under legal sentence and living in exile outside Korea. He acknowledged the WCC's support in a message of greetings he sent to the Eighth Assembly of the WCC at Harare in 1998; he stated, thus “ I make special note of the fact that the Council has stood with the churches, intellectuals, students and other people of Korea during their long years of struggle to achieve democracy and reunification. I will be forever thankful for the solidarity and support it extended to me all those years that I was in agony.”

We are grateful to have had the opportunity to support Mr Kim including the time his life was under threat because of his relentless struggle for justice and peace. As the people of

South Korea mourn his passing away, I write to express our sincere condolences and deep respect on behalf of the World Council of Churches and on my own behalf. We express our special prayers and thoughts for you, Dr Whi Ho Lee and your three sons. May your bereaved family and the people of the Korean Peninsula find comfort. Of Kim Dae-jung it truly can be said, *“Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God” (Matthew 5:9).*

Yours sincerely,
Rev. Dr Samuel Kobia
General secretary

- **Tsuen Wan Communiqué from International Consultation on Peace, Reconciliation and Reunification of the Korean Peninsula: Towards an Ecumenical Vision beyond the Tozanso Process, 23 October 2009**

1. One hundred and thirty-seven church leaders from across the world have today recommitted the ecumenical community to the goal of Peace, Reconciliation and Reunification of the Korean Peninsula.

2. Marking the 25th anniversary of the Consultation convened by the Commission of the Churches on International Affairs of the World Council of Churches (WCC) and by the Christian Conference of Asia (CCA) held in Tozanso, Japan in 1984 – the first ecumenical gathering to take steps towards the peaceful reunification of the divided Korean peninsula – the WCC and the CCA brought together church leaders and participants from the two Koreas and from across the world in Tsuen Wan, Hong Kong, 21-23 October 2009. The Tsuen Wan Consultation included presentations from the churches of North and South Korea, a keynote address from WCC general secretary, the Rev. Dr Samuel Kobia, an overview of developments over the past 25 years, input from political analysts, a joint celebration of the Eucharist led by North and South Korean church leaders, and engaged in worship, Bible study and prayers for God’s guidance and inspiration towards the goal of peaceful reunification.

3. The healing and reconciling spirit of the Tozanso process was affirmed by participants throughout the Tsuen Wan Consultation. They recalled the 1989 WCC policy statement on “Peace and the Reunification of Korea”. This statement commenced by referring to the WCC 1983 “Statement on Peace and Justice” and then went on:

“The yearning for peace, justice and unity converges most poignantly and in a unique manner in the case of Korea. The Korean people have been divided by foreign forces, and remain divided by force and have been submitted to coercive systems of control which perpetuate this division and are justified by it. Opposing conceptions of justice have been created and systematized in Korea, where 'security' imposes a continual state of confrontation. A so-called 'peace' is maintained at the cost of the largest concentration of military force in the world.” (1989 WCC Statement)

4. The Consultation recognized the many positive developments since Tozanso, including:

- opportunities for visits by Christian leaders to North Korea and for North Korean Christian leaders to visit other countries, especially the opportunity for North and South Korean church leaders to meet and to gain in understanding and trusting each other;
- the governments of North and South Korea committing to a process towards reunification in the June 15 North-South Joint Declaration (2000), and in the October 4 Declaration (2007) which further spelt out the steps towards reunification;
- increasing contact between the people and the governments of North and South Korea through people to people exchanges, family reunions, tourist visits, the sharing of resources and economic cooperation;
- growing understanding and trust between North and South Korea.

5. However, in recent years difficulties have emerged which have challenged the process towards reunification. These difficulties include:

- hostility towards the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) on the part of other countries, especially from the USA and also from Japan, leading to even greater reliance on military power and military threats;
- the change of government in South Korea in February 2008 which brought a sharp change in outlook and policies towards North Korea;
- the cessation of tourism into the North and the downturn in economic co-operation.

6. Participants in the Tsuen Wan Consultation strongly affirmed that the gospel of Jesus Christ commits Christians to work against evil, injustice and suffering in all its forms, and to pray and work for God's justice, peace and unity in the world. The Korean people have suffered for too long from their forced division. They are one people, one culture, one nation, yet they remain divided. Justice demands that they be reunited in peace and in common commitment to one another. The rest of the world needs to step back from policies, prejudices and pressures which hinder the Korean people from moving forward in the process that will lead to their peaceful reunification and from shaping their future together.

7. In the spirit of the Tozanso Conference, and seeking to advance the principles and tasks declared at Tozanso, the Tsuen Wan Consultation offers the support of the ecumenical community for new steps towards reunification by:

- North and South Korea fully implementing the June 15 North-South Joint Declaration and the October 4 Declaration;

- calling for the lifting of all sanctions against the DPRK under United Nations Security Council Resolution 1874, while also noting that Resolution 1874 allows for assistance for humanitarian aid and for sustainable development;
- promoting the concept of “reunification as a process” which could involve progressive steps for peaceful co-existence, further economic co-operation, and inter-Korean confederation, leading to complete reunification;
- establishing immediate bilateral negotiations between the DPRK and the USA in order to reduce current tensions;
- calling for the normalizing of relations between the DPRK and Japan;
- urging the USA to withdraw its hostile policies towards the DPRK, and advocating for the cessation of all multinational military exercises in and around the Korean peninsula;
- encouraging the international community to allow space and time for direct negotiations between North and South Korea towards a lessening of tensions between them and towards peace, reconciliation and reunification;
- supporting the WCC’s statements and initiatives towards a world free of all nuclear weapons;
- encouraging the Christians of North and South Korea to celebrate a turning point in their endeavours for peace and reunification at the 10th WCC Assembly in Busan, Korea, in 2013.

8. It is the fervent hope and prayer of all participants at the Tsuen Wan Consultation that the divided people of Korea will be reunited soon. We long for the day when the people of the Korean peninsula, together with the rest of the world, can join together in thanksgiving and joy to celebrate that they are again one people and one nation.

“In the name of Christ Jesus, our peace, in whom we are made one, who has broken down the wall of hostility, creating in himself one new people, reconciling all people to God in one body through the cross, thereby bringing the hostility to an end...” (from Ephesians 2:13-16).

Tsuen Wan, Hong Kong

South Asia

- **Statement of the international consultation on peace, security and development in South Asia by WCC-CCA-South Asian councils of churches, 30 March to 2 April 2009**

South Asia continues to be one of the most volatile regions of the world. The negative effects of ongoing ethnic conflicts, civil wars, ethnic cleansing, communal and political violence, terrorism, counter terrorism, religious extremism, militarization, gross and systematic violation of human rights, unresolved inter-state and intra-state conflicts, and subversive economic interests, etc., are visible today more than ever before in the region. South Asia has become a hotbed of the war on terror and a victim of the strategic interests of major power blocs keeping the region in constant turmoil and uncertainty. The nature of its volatility and that of the conflicts has been redefined by the US-led war on terror, wherein the rulers of the region have joined together as partners. This has wider repercussions in the region as resentments against foreign forces in the region are growing among various sectors in society, especially as they feel that peace and security in South Asia are today defined in terms of American strategic interests and objectives. Home to one fifth of the world's population, this region is accountable for fifty percent of the world's illiterate and forty percent of the world's poor. This poverty stricken region faces the worst hit of innumerable adversities in terms of securing peace, security and development. The extent of human deprivation in the region contrasts with the large armies, modern weapons and increasing defence budgets, arms race, and nuclear power struggle, which keep the region seething with growing unrest. The criminalization of politics and corruption undermine the democratic principles of the electoral system.

While the 25-year old ethnic conflict and civil war in Sri Lanka reaches its climax, the country faces a continuously worsening humanitarian crisis exceeding all imaginable proportions. Tens of thousands of civilians are trapped by the war in the northern war zone. According to the UN High Commissioner for Human rights, around 180,000 people are trapped in the war zone amidst shelling and crossfire, lacking basic amenities like food, medicine, shelter, sanitation etc. There are disturbing reports of the conditions inside the camps in which those who have come out of the war zone are confined. At the same time, the country faces the emergence of religious intolerance and extremism.

Although the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) is engaged in counter terrorism in Afghanistan, the overwhelming presence and reliance on 52,000-strong foreign forces in Afghanistan has created more animosity among the local people as well as in neighbouring Pakistan. This situation creates an atmosphere ripe for extremist groups to exploit the religious sentiments of ordinary people and involve them in committing more violence. Today, Afghanistan is plagued by a new insurgency and a deep humanitarian crisis prevails in the country. This warrants a situation where we must step forward with assistance to strengthen areas of governance, rule of law, democratic institutions and reconstruction of the country. Pakistan is buffeted by numerous and

serious crises and is still in the grip of political crisis, growing religious fundamentalism, and terrorism. The continuous terrorist attacks, clashes between security forces and militants, military operations, political violence, inter-tribe sectarian clashes and border clashes are the biggest threat to the state and citizens of Pakistan. India, the largest democracy in the world, faces serious threats to its peace, security and development. Religious intolerance and the politicization of religion, the persecution of minorities, and criminalization of politics have become increasing trends in India today. India's long cherished religious tolerance and secular values have been threatened by religious fundamentalists. The constitutional rights to profess and propagate their faith granted to all citizens are threatened. The attacks on Christians in Kandhamal, Orissa, and Karnataka, and sporadic violence against religious minorities in other parts of India are causes of serious concern as the incidents build walls of separation and hatred between communities and people. The democratic transition in Bangladesh in the recent election gave much hope to the people of Bangladesh. However, the emerging trend of religious extremism and fundamentalism and also the recent trend of dissatisfaction among the military forces are serious concerns, as they could derail the democratic governance in the country.

While these problems menace peace, security and development in the region in various ways, there are certain silver linings which provide hope amidst these turbulent times in the history of the South Asian countries. All South Asian countries have undergone democratic transitions and electoral processes in recent times. Countries such as Bhutan, Nepal, the Maldives, Bangladesh, and Pakistan have undergone democratic electoral processes. Following 100 years of rule by absolute monarchy, the Himalayan kingdom of Bhutan shifted to democracy. After having experienced deadly armed conflicts for a decade, Nepal ended its centuries old monarchy and has undergone a series of transformations which are shaping it as a federal democratic republic. In the midst of increasing violence and the military's highhandedness in Pakistan, the world has witnessed the victory of the people's power in the fight against authoritarianism, and the struggle of civil society mobilization for the restoration of an independent judiciary. The Maldives has ended its one man dictatorship and the first democratic government in three decades was established in a multi-party election recently. After several years of political turmoil and two years of a military-supported caretaker administration, the outcome of the election process in the country has further re-enforced the hope of political order returning to Bangladesh.

Concerned by the alarming situation affecting the South Asian countries and its manifold impacts on nurturing peace, security and development, and despite initiatives from different quarters of society and different national, diplomatic and ecumenical interventions, the World Council of Churches (WCC), the Christian Conference of Asia (CCA), and the South Asian Councils of Churches (SACC) organized an international consultation on Peace, Security and Development in South Asia, which was held at Whitefield, Bangalore from 30 March to 2 April 2009 .

The Consultation was aimed at exploring: possibilities of hope amidst desperation; assuring solidarity and support to the suffering people of South Asia; accompanying the

churches in the region in their mission and prophetic witness to uphold the values of peace with justice; and assisting them in exploring interventions that could bring peace, reconciliation, security and development to this volatile region.

South Asian church and ecumenical leaders, together with representatives from churches from the WCC and CCA constituencies in different Asian countries and ecumenical development and relief/humanitarian aid agencies from Europe and North America, attended the consultation and agreed that the grave humanitarian crisis – threat to peace and security in South Asia – are a challenge not only to the churches, but also to the conscience of the international community. Having listened to and realized the seriousness of the situation in various South Asian countries, the WCC-CCA-SACC Consultation:

- Condemns all forms of terrorism both by state and non-state actors in the South Asia region;
- Calls upon all parties concerned to eschew violence and invest in negotiated settlements of all issues which will ensure peace, security and development in the region;
- Expresses concern over the emerging religious extremism and fundamentalism in all South Asian countries;
- Expresses deep concern over the continuously worsening humanitarian crisis in the northern parts of Sri Lanka;
- Appeals to the Sri Lankan government and the LTTE to immediately stop the ongoing military operations to ensure safe passage arranged by credible and neutral agencies for those who are trapped in the war zone;
- Urges the LTTE to facilitate safe conduct for the people who want to leave such areas and refrain from any form of forced conscription, of both children and others;
- Appeals to the Sri Lankan government to allow international and national agencies to address and assist the persons in camps and in the conflict areas;
- Urges the Sri Lankan government to take initiatives conducive to undertaking talks with all concerned and also to present an outline of a political formula with a view to finding a lasting solution to the issues behind the conflict;
- Assures the churches in Sri Lanka of the support of the churches around the world, represented by the WCC, the CCA and the SACC, as they are engaged in responding to the urgent humanitarian needs and also in working with others in seeking practical ways of resolving the conflict;
- Congratulates the people of Nepal for achieving peace and democracy through a long and united struggle and urges all political actors in Nepal to make every effort to complete the historical task of drafting the new constitution of the federal democratic republic of Nepal within the stipulated time-frame;

- Welcomes the democratic transformation in Bhutan and the constitutional guarantees for religious freedom in the country;
- Calls for the withdrawal of U.S.-led international combat troops from Afghanistan and appeals to the international community to ensure that the resultant power vacuum may be filled by a UN-sponsored peacekeeping force with Asian forces as major players, which will help the country's transition towards stability;
- Urges the Churches and national ecumenical councils in the region, together with the WCC, CCA and SACC to undertake measures that will capacitate in mitigating the suffering of the civilians who are facing threats to their life, property and resources, to equip their constituents in skills of conflict transformation, while at the same time lobbying with their respective governments to work towards the restoration of peace in all South Asian countries and in the region.

Within the context of this turbulent period in the history of South Asia, when situations of war and conflict, killings and the massacre of innocent civilians are pervasive in people's daily lives in South Asia, the ecumenical movement and churches are challenged to be instruments of God's peace and reconciliation. They are called to revisit their witness and mission to strengthen a sense of belonging in God's reconciling world. The people of God in South Asia, together with their accompaniers from around the globe, are encouraged to work towards peace, security and reconciliation which will ultimately ensure the fullness of life for all.

*"Your people will rebuild the ancient ruins and will raise up the age-old foundations; you will be called Repairer of Broken Walls, Restorer of Streets with Dwellings."
(Isaiah 58:12)*

South Pacific

- **Letter from WCC general secretary to The Most Reverend Jabez Leslie Bryce, bishop of Polynesia Anglican Church, to communicate the distress and sadness felt on hearing of the 8.3 magnitude earthquake and resulting tsunami, 1 October 2009**

Dear Archbishop Bryce,

It is with great distress and sadness that we learned about a powerful 8.3-magnitude earthquake which struck the South Pacific Islands on Tuesday 29th September, generating a tsunami which killed more than 150 people and caused enormous loss and damage to houses and the property of people in American Samoa, Samoa and Tonga. We are particularly sorry as this follows closely after the tragic boating incident in Tonga a few weeks back.

On behalf of the World Council of Churches, I would like to convey our profound and heartfelt condolences to the people in affected areas. During this dreadful period when we are all shocked and dazed at this tragedy that has brought loss of life and suffering to thousands of people, we assure you of our prayers and calling upon our gracious God to bring comfort and relief to all those who are suffering.

As you know, the World Council of Churches is committed and ready to contribute in any possible manner to overcome the catastrophic impact of this natural disaster and to alleviate the suffering of the affected people. The humanitarian aid arm of the ecumenical movement, Action of Churches Together (ACT International) is trying to extend all possible support through its member churches in affected areas.

We sincerely pray to God Almighty to bestow mercy on all those who grieve the loss of family, relatives, friends and neighbours, for those who are injured, and for those who are separated from and searching for family members. We pray for God's divine comfort and consolation to the bereaved families at this moment of their immense grief. We are aware of the fact that the days ahead of you all will be demanding as you struggle to cope with the unexpected situation; but we trust in God and in human resilience and kindness. At this time of distress and sense of loss, let our deep trust in God Almighty strengthen one another so that we may go forward in faith.

“God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore, we will not fear, though the earth should change, though the mountains shake in the heart of the sea, though its waters roar and foam, though the mountains tremble with its tumult”
(Psalm 46:1-3)

This message of prayer, solidarity, compassion and hope has been shared with ecumenical brothers and sisters in the affected countries.

Yours in His Service
Rev. Dr Samuel Kobia
General secretary

Sri Lanka

- **Expression of concern by WCC general secretary at the deteriorating situation in Sri Lanka, 20 April 2007**

The ethnic conflicts and violence, which have been raging in Sri Lanka, have become a matter of serious concern again in recent weeks. Reports from Sri Lanka continue to reflect the alarming deterioration of the situation in the country. The intensification of killing and violence has turned more and more areas of the country into a battlefield. The

escalation of fighting causes the deaths of innocent civilians, military personnel and rebel cadres daily, while the number of abductions, conscription of children, and displacement of people is on the increase. Civilians are caught up in fighting between the Government forces and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Elam (LTTE). Aerial bombing, mortar shelling and the use of claymore mines have added to the plight of the already suffering people. The northern and eastern parts of the country remain isolated with access in certain areas severely restricted. More than 200,000 civilians have been displaced in recent weeks.

The Cease Fire Agreement, signed between the Government of Sri Lanka and the LTTE on 2 February 2002, was considered promising in the efforts towards ending the ethnic conflict. The international community had extended support to the initiative hoping that it would result in both parties refraining from activities that would undermine the good intentions behind the agreement or impede confidence building measure. However, both the Government and the LTTE violated the Cease Fire Agreement despite the warnings and rulings against them by the Sri Lanka Monitoring Mission set up to monitor the ceasefire's implementation. The escalation of violence since the end of 2005 has pushed this Norwegian-backed peace process onto the back burner despite earlier appeals from the international community. Now, despite the ensuing humanitarian crisis in the northern and eastern parts of the country, Sri Lanka appears to have been forgotten by the international community.

Over the years, the World Council of Churches has monitored the situation in Sri Lanka and called for negotiations between the parties whenever and wherever possible. We are deeply distressed by the current intensification of fighting which affects the lives of thousands of innocent people in the country. Taking into account the protracted fighting in Sri Lanka we in the WCC are convinced that the pursuit of a final military solution is an exercise in futility; the parties to the conflict need to commit themselves to a political solution as the only viable and noble alternative.

We, therefore, appeal to the Government of Sri Lanka and the LTTE to return to the obligations of the Cease Fire Agreement and to therein seek durable solutions to end the fighting that is affecting the lives of so many people. As WCC we strongly appeal to the Government of Sri Lanka and the LTTE to reach a settlement of the ethnic conflicts and put an end to the violence through dialogue and negotiations.

In addition, we urge all parties responsible for the conflict to respect the UN Guiding Principles on Internal Displacements and International Humanitarian Law, making every effort to ensure the security, human rights and dignity of each individual in Sri Lanka.

On behalf of the World Council of Churches I call upon Christians and churches around the world to be constant in prayer for all the people of Sri Lanka who have been undergoing such a traumatising ordeal.

We pray for God's grace and guidance for the efforts of all those who are engaged in their efforts for peace in the country, especially the churches in Sri Lanka working towards peace, reconciliation and reconstruction.

May the grace of God inspire and guide the people of Sri Lanka in their longing for peace with justice, reconciliation and communal harmony in their country.

Rev. Dr Samuel Kobia
General Secretary

- **Living Letters ecumenical team to visit to Sri Lanka, 4-12 August 2007**

War-torn Sri Lanka is to receive the first of a series of ecumenical "living letters" teams which will visit Christian communities facing situations of violence in different regions of the world in the run up to the 2011 International Ecumenical Peace Convocation being organized by the World Council of Churches.

The ecumenical team will be in Sri Lanka from 4-12 August. "Living letters" is a mission by church representatives to express solidarity with and learn from the peacemaking efforts of local churches. The team includes four church representatives – from the USA, Kenya, Indonesia and South Korea. They are to meet major church and civil society players, as well as people from the grassroots in areas affected by the fighting.

"We want the delegation to be exposed to the stark realities of war in the North and East before they meet church leaders and civil society representatives based in Colombo," says Rev. Dr Jayasiri Peiris, general secretary of the National Christian Council of Sri Lanka which is hosting the "living letters" team.

The programme of the visit includes exposure trips to areas in the northern and eastern regions of the country (Mannar, Batticaloa and Jaffna); meetings with church leaders and officials of the National Christian Council; encounters with members of congregations in the country's capital Colombo and other areas and meetings with human rights activists.

Conflict in Sri Lanka has over the past 25 years claimed thousands of lives on both sides of the ethnic divide between the Sinhala and Tamil communities. Thousands of refugees have sought asylum abroad while many thousands are internally displaced. The civilian population has been put through tremendous hardships due to summary executions, torture, illegal detentions, embargoes on essential items and the forced recruitment of children as fighters.

Despite a cease-fire agreement signed in February 2002 between the government of Sri Lanka and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam, a lethal escalation of armed violence between the two parties since early 2006 has been a source of deep concern to the ecumenical family. On September 2006 the WCC central committee called both parties to

respect the cease-fire agreement and put an end to all hostilities, resuming peace negotiations without delay. Last April, WCC General Secretary Rev. Dr Samuel Kobia reiterated the Council's concern and appeal.

Churches in Sri Lanka have provided cautious and critical support to the peace process, among other things through interreligious cooperative endeavours to mobilize people for peace and national reconciliation. The "living letters" team will find out more about the churches efforts and needs, and will report back to the wider ecumenical family at a time when, in Kobia's words, "despite the ensuing humanitarian crisis in the northern and eastern parts of the country, Sri Lanka appears to have been forgotten by the international community".

The "living letters" teams are part of what is expected to become a major worldwide mobilization of churches for peace that will culminate with an International Ecumenical Peace Convocation to be held as conclusion of the WCC Decade to Overcome Violence in early May 2011.

Members of the team are:

- Professor Eunice Karanja Kamaara, a Christian ethicist from Kenya who heads the Department of Philosophy and Religious Studies at Moi University in Nairobi.
- Dr Bo-hyuk Suh, a university professor and researcher on peace issues in the Korean peninsula and former member of the National Human Rights Commission of South Korea.
- Ms Jennifer Leath, a graduate from the Union Theological Seminary (New York), is the co-moderator of the Joint Consultative Group between Pentecostals and the WCC and a member of the newly appointed WCC youth body.
- Ms Peggy Adeline Mekel, a junior lecturer of business and economics at Sam Ratulangi University in Manado, Indonesia, is a WCC central committee member.

Mr Santha Fernando, executive secretary of the Commission for Justice and Peace of the National Christian Council of Sri Lanka will join the team on behalf of the local churches.

Support staff being sent by the WCC to accompany the delegation will include Aruna Gnanadason and Semegnish Asfaw.

A summary of the visiting team:

- Some view neither religion nor ethnicity as a problem. They observed that, political instability and leadership failures are the core problems in the country.
- The extreme minority of Christians in the country limits the effectiveness of churches' capacity to have substantial influence for justice and peace.
- The churches are divided along ethnic lines and often it is unable to speak as one despite cooperation among different church groups.

- The war was declared officially over in May 2009 after three decades of civil war. This allows the ecumenical movement to pray and support Sri Lanka in the processes of rebuilding and reconciliation.

The first visit by the Living Letters was to the beautiful island of Sri Lanka. After more than two decades of civil war the Island's beauty has faded replacing it with ugly scenes war. The civil war started in 1983 has been complicated by both ethnic and religious animosity. Some did not have this view. They concluded that, political instability and leadership failures are the core problems in the country.

As The Living Letters Team journeyed from Colombo to the Eastern parts of Sri Lanka, they learnt from people the challenges that the country was facing. The war left thousands displaced, homeless and starved. There were cases of disappearances, abductions and kidnappings especially of civil activists. The team also experienced first-hand encounters with the high military regime, through varied road blocks and check points.

Sri Lanka has 6% of Christians. Living Letters team observed that the extreme minority of Christians in the country limits the effectiveness of the churches' capacity to have substantial influence for justice and peace. As much as the churches have made efforts in peace initiatives, the perception by many people as the team observed is more military action to deter the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Elam (LTTE).

Another challenge of the churches is division along ethnic lines which often makes it difficult to speak as one voice. This is despite some levels of cooperation among Protestant, Roman Catholic and Evangelical groups. Christianity is also seen as an external force by the Sinhala-Buddhist nexus which threatens religious freedom. The constitution accords Buddhism the "foremost place," though it is not recognized as the state religion. The constitution also provides for the right of members of other faiths to freely practice their religion. While the Government publicly endorses this right, in practice, this was not the case.

Close to two years after the Living Letters visit, the Sri Lankan President Mahinda Rajapaksa on May 19th 2009 officially declared the end of the war. Despite this, as Gethin Chamberlain of *The Observer* put it; "Colombo needs massive international aid. It also needs to bind up the wounds of a fatally divided conduct of the civil war." The International Ecumenical Peace Convocation will provide the ecumenical movement with an opportunity not only to pray for Sri Lanka to re-build but also seek ways of supporting the country in its reconciliation and quest for just-peace.

- **Statement on the humanitarian crisis in Sri Lanka adopted at the WCC executive committee, Lübeck, Germany, 23-26 February 2008**

1. The civil war in Sri Lanka, which has continued for over twenty-five years, raises fresh concerns as the prospects for the resumption of the peace process has fallen apart once again. The parties to the conflict, in spite of international mediation, have not reached any agreement that would lead to the resolution of this protracted conflict. On 2 January 2008, the Government of Sri Lanka (GoSL) withdrew from the ceasefire agreement with the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Ealam (LTTE). Since then the fighting has intensified to a degree worse than it was prior to the 2002 ceasefire agreement. The intensification of the war in the northern part of the country put people under tremendous hardships. Gross violations of human rights, disappearances and killings of non-combatants are on the rise. Thousands of civilians are internally displaced and are at tremendous risk due to the fighting between the military and the LTTE in the LTTE occupied area of Vanni. Unarmed and trapped in this war zone, thousands of civilians, including children, are caught in the crossfire. The people are under pressure from both sides of the conflict to support its respective strategy and actions. This further aggravates the people's suffering and fear. The absence of effective mechanisms to receive and investigate complaints of human rights violations, contributes to the helplessness and vulnerability of the people. Although concerns about this situation have been expressed by UN agencies, the European Union and others, there has been no positive response from the government.

2. Reports from humanitarian agencies, which were operational in the Northern Province of Sri Lanka, have indicated that the escalation in the fighting between the government forces and the LTTE has created a new humanitarian crisis with serious consequences for the survival of innocent civilians. Recently, the government has asked all humanitarian workers to leave the LTTE controlled region, for their own safety, as the military plans a major offensive there. The displaced civilians in Vanni and other places in the North are finding it extremely difficult to cope with the situation as they are forced to live without basic amenities. The closure of the main highway between the north and the south of the country, coupled with government regulations, have restricted the flows of food, medical supplies, materials for temporary shelter, water and sanitation facilities to this region. The humanitarian costs of the war are increasing day by day. As the deteriorating situation of the country continues to tear apart the lives of millions of Sri Lankans, a sense of hopelessness permeates the country.

3. The protection of the rights of all its citizens and in particular of unarmed civilians, including children and the elderly, is a primary responsibility of any government even at times of war. In this context, the GoSL, a signatory to the Geneva Convention of 1949, cannot overlook its legal obligations under International Humanitarian Law and its moral obligation to comply with the provisions of the 1977 additional protocols. Emergency measures taken by a government should not exceed the limitations established by International Law. The welfare of the civilian population must not be compromised for military exigencies. The practice of the LTTE of forcibly recruiting civilians and deploying them in civilian areas places non-combatants at the risk of being attacked by the military. This is further contributing to the increased numbers of casualties. Restrictions are placed in the path of UN agencies, other humanitarian agencies as well as of countries involved in trying to negotiate for lasting peace in Sri

Lanka. As the situation in Sri Lanka worsens, the international community must urgently find ways of engaging all parties and resolve the humanitarian crisis as soon as possible. The situation in the country today, warrants the immediate attention of the international community to encourage and assist the GoSL and the LTTE to resume the peace talks.

4. The churches in Sri Lanka have been playing a proactive role in peace building ever since the country slipped into this war. Interreligious initiatives taken by the Sri Lankan churches in cooperation with civil society organizations in the country have helped to mobilize people from all walks of life, including the international community, to be concerned about peace and reconciliation in Sri Lanka. The National Christian Council in Sri Lanka, through its Commission on Justice and Peace, has been contributing significantly to peace building efforts, even at the grass root level, in the conflict affected areas. Sri Lankan church leaders recently urged the warring parties to invite international humanitarian agencies to set up peace zones in the conflict affected areas. Over the years, the World Council of Churches (WCC) has been accompanying the Churches in Sri Lanka in their peace and reconciliation ministry. In August 2007, a Living Letters team, in the context of the Decade to Overcome Violence, visited the country to express the solidarity and concern of the global ecumenical family. As part of its global advocacy initiatives, the WCC's UN Advocacy Week programme, which will be held from 17-24 November 2008 in New York, will focus peace and reconciliation in Sri Lanka also as a priority concern.

5. While the worldwide ecumenical community seeks to stand in solidarity with the churches in Sri Lanka and their people, we are reminded of St. Paul's message that "we are one body, and when one part of the body suffers all suffer with it (1 Cor. 12: 26). Our Lord Jesus Christ calls us to be peacemakers and it is this calling that compels us to continue our commitment to peace and reconciliation in Sri Lanka.

The executive committee of the World Council of Churches, meeting in Lübeck, Germany from 22-26 September 2008, therefore:

A. **Expresses** its deep concern about the escalation of the war and all kinds of armed violence in the country.

B. **Condemns** the killings of non-combatants and all other forms of human rights violations by government forces and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Ealam;

C. **Calls on** the warring parties to adhere to International Humanitarian Law, the UN's Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement and other humanitarian norms; and to receive and investigate complaints of human rights violations as required by law locally and internationally;

D. **Appeals to** the international community to put pressure on the warring parties to respect the relevant provisions of International Humanitarian Law to ensure that all civilians in conflict affected regions in the country are safe from any forms of threat to

their life, inhuman treatment by the armed forces of either side, taking of hostages and assaults on personal dignity;

E. *Urges* the government of Sri Lanka and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Ealam to jointly invite and assist the International Committee of the Red Cross and the UN High Commissioner for Refugees to set up peace corridors and peace zones for the safety of civilians in the war zones in the country;

F. *Urges* the government of Sri Lanka to provide all civilians adequate access to basic amenities for their survival including supplies of food, water, fuel, and medicine;

G. *Urges* the government of Sri Lanka to provide churches, religious groups and civil society organizations access to the northern provinces in order to be engaged in humanitarian work;

H. *Urges* the government of Sri Lanka to provide adequate access for the media to report on the conditions of life of the people in these provinces;

I. *Requests* churches and the ecumenical community all over the world to support the efforts of the international community to contribute to a process for the peaceful resolution to the Sri Lankan conflict;

J. *Commends* the churches in the country that are working diligently and with courage to secure peace with justice, and urges the WCC member churches and the ecumenical Community to uphold the people and churches of Sri Lanka in prayer;

K. *Reiterates* our earlier call to the government of Sri Lanka and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Ealam to resume peace negotiation through international mediators.

- **Letter from WCC general secretary to H.E. Mahinda Rajapaksa, president of Sri Lanka, expressed concern at news of the killing of journalist Mr Lasantha Wickremetunge, 13 January 2009**

Your Excellency,

I deeply appreciate your response to my letter of 1 December 2008, through the Presidential Secretariat on 16 December 2008.

As I conveyed to you in my earlier message, I have been following with great consternation the intensification of war and killings of so many people in the Northern part of Sri Lanka in the past weeks. Today I need to call Your Excellency's attention again as we came to know about the assassination of Mr Lasantha Wickremetunge, the editor-in-chief of the Sunday Leader and a well-known journalist in your country who was brutally murdered on 8 January en route to his work.

During my visit to Sri Lanka in October 2008, I had opportunities to meet with a group of journalists and they shared with me about their serious concern of the unsafe situation as they are unable to discharge their professional responsibilities because they are constantly under threat. They also shared with me that 14 journalists have been killed in less than two years and not a single culprit has been arrested. The murder of Mr Lasantha Wickremetunge last week and killings of several other journalists in the past few years deepen the concern over a series of calculated attempts to stifle the media and to suppress differences of opinion and freedom of expression by violent means.

The disregard of due processes of justice by any group that takes the law into their hands and executes anyone who opposes or differs in opinion could only lead to an erosion of faith in constituted authorities and cause a rapid deterioration of the democratic process.

As we express our profound distress at these developments, we call on Your Excellency to ensure that immediate measures are taken to set up an independent commission to make impartial investigations and to ensure that the culprits are brought before a court of law to stand trial for the crime committed.

Thanking you for your kind attention,

Yours sincerely,
Rev. Dr Samuel Kobia
General secretary

- **Letter from WCC general secretary to H.E. Mahinda Rajapaksa, president of Sri Lanka asking for the immediate release of Mr Shanta Fernando, executive secretary of the Justice and Peace Commission of the National Christian Council of Sri Lanka, 21 April 2009**

Your Excellency,

On behalf of the World Council of Churches I would like to express our deep concern regarding the arrest and detention of Mr Shanta Fernando, executive secretary of the Justice and Peace Commission of the National Christian Council in Sri Lanka (NCCSL). According to the information we received from our member council, the NCC Sri Lanka, Mr Shanta Fernando was taken into custody by the Terrorism Investigative Department of the Sri Lankan Police at the Colombo International Airport on 27 March 2009 on his way to India. No specific reason for the arrest or detention of Mr Fernando has been given so far.

I understand that the leaders of the Christian churches in Sri Lanka, in a letter dated 28 March 2009, conveyed their readiness to cooperate with Sri Lankan authorities in any processes of investigation and urged your intervention to release Mr Fernando. Nonetheless, he remains a victim of unlawful arrest and detention.

I personally know Mr Fernando, as he was one of the main coordinators of the programmes organized by the NCC Sri Lanka when I visited Sri Lanka in October 2008 along with the international team that accompanied me. As a senior executive staff of the NCC Sri Lanka, Mr Fernando has been an associate of the WCC's programme Decade to Overcome Violence (DOV), which aims to ensure peace and reconciliation in conflict and violence affected societies. Mr Fernando, who had earlier served with our sister international ecumenical organization, the Asian Alliance of YMCAs in Hong Kong, has been widely recognized as an Asian ecumenical leader with integrity and a strong commitment to justice and peace. Our member constituencies in Sri Lanka, member churches and the National Christian Council, have consistently stood for a peaceful resolution to Sri Lanka's ethnic conflict including a political solution based on equality, justice and the dignity for all Sri Lankans.

Your Excellency, we are concerned that the actions surrounding the arrest and detention of Mr Fernando did not follow the procedures prescribed by law. As the reasons for his arrest have not been provided, there is thereby a violation of the fundamental rights guaranteed by the Sri Lankan Constitution. Moreover this constitutes a violation of international human rights law, and, in particular, of Article 9 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, to which Sri Lanka is a state party.

On behalf of the World Council of Churches and its member constituencies all over the world, I urge Your Excellency's intervention and without any further delay release Mr Shanta Fernando from detention.

Thank you for your prompt attention to this urgent matter,

Yours truly,
Rev. Dr Samuel Kobia
General secretary

Taiwan

- **Letter of condolence from WCC general secretary to Rev. Andrew T.C. Chang, general secretary of the Presbyterian Church in Taiwan, offering prayers and sympathy to the families of victims of Typhoon Morakot, 18 September 2009**

Dear Rev. Andrew Chang,

Greetings from the World Council of Churches.

Although it is belated, I am writing this to offer our prayers and convey our sympathy and profound condolences to the families of the victims of Typhoon Morakot, which swept

many districts of central and southern Taiwan. It is with great sadness that we learned about the destruction caused during the typhoon. In fact, we heard from WCC central committee member, Ms. Ming Min (Nancy) Lin Cheng, about the impact of the disastrous typhoon, and also about the deep involvement of the PCT members in relief and rehabilitation assistance to the affected victims. It is our hope and prayer that the typhoon-battered areas will be restored to their normal situation at the earliest.

While sharing your grief on the tragedy affecting the lives of many people in your country, I take this opportunity to assure you, your colleagues and all members of the PCT of our prayers. May almighty God bestow mercy on all those who are suffering and grant divine comfort and consolation to the bereaved families.

Yours in Christ,
Rev. Dr Samuel Kobia
General secretary

Armenia

- **Statement by WCC Moderator Rev Dr Walter Altmann at the Armenian Genocide memorial, Yerevan, 25 September 2007**

We stand here in silence, a silence that is a cry of anguish in this place before Almighty God.

We stand here as a family, a family of churches from many lands embracing Armenian sisters and brothers in the memory of your sorrow.

We stand here as human beings remembering the mothers and fathers, the sons and the daughters struck down by genocidal violence in 1915, the one-and-a-half million who died, the half million more who were uprooted from their most ancient homeland.

We also stand here in tribute: to the dignity of those who suffered, to those who have protested including Muslim leaders, to the courageous villagers who helped save Armenians in Syria, and to the handful of Danish, German, British and American church workers and diplomats who brought news of this vast atrocity to the outside world, 92 years ago.

But this is not a place of yesterday. It is a place for our day. In the isolation of these killing fields, we remember Cambodia. In the inaction of the outside world, we think of Rwanda. And in the need for others to recognize such tragedy, we are reminded of the struggle of the Jewish people.

As part of the struggle for public recognition, the World Council of Churches 28 years ago took action to ensure that the United Nations recorded the Armenian genocide. 24 years ago the WCC Assembly adopted its own statement of recognition – to further break the silence, to clearly acknowledge your pain and so that other peoples might be spared a similar fate. The worldwide community of the WCC has also shared its solidarity with the Armenian Church and people on anniversaries of 1915.

Knowing that we are not immune from such crimes recurring today and recognizing that the prevention of genocide is an obligation for every state, the WCC is working to see that instruments of prevention especially the new international norm – the Responsibility to Protect – will ensure the safety of vulnerable populations at serious risk.

This is also a place to remember how much life and commitment we have seen in your church in these few days. In the bright faces of its youth, the strong voices of its seminarians, the wisdom of its leaders and the open doors of its churches you have given

us assurance. We see that we are disciples together of God who so loves the world, who has conquered death and the grave, and who is risen to offer us full newness of life.

Georgia

- **Joint statement by WCC and CEC on the situation in Georgia, 12 August 2008**

The World Council of Churches and the Conference of European Churches join in expressing our alarm and distress at the violent events of recent days in the Caucasus. The use of force in the dispute over South Ossetia and Abkhazia has cost the precious lives of civilians and soldiers, risks destabilizing a fragile region, and reawakens deep fears there and far beyond.

We affirm the calls from the heads of the Russian Orthodox Church and the Georgian Orthodox Church for a ceasefire, for negotiations between the combatants, and respect for the peoples involved. We affirm a similar call for peace and for urgent relief work within the affected regions from the Evangelical Baptist Church of Georgia, a member church of the Conference of European Churches. We encourage churches around the world to support these sister churches and the international ecumenical emergency appeal initiated by Action by Churches Together.

It is fitting that Europe gives leadership in making peace. The European Union and the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe are offering an appropriate framework for resolving the crisis. We urge all involved to cooperate actively with their endeavours. These multilateral initiatives send a welcome signal to the world that the politics of armed force are bankrupt.

We support the call for military forces to return to positions held before the current violence. The United Nations must ensure the territorial integrity and political independence of Georgia in accordance with the UN Charter and by collective action of the UN Security Council. Parties to the conflict must act urgently in a manner that will convince the international community that they are pursuing legitimate interests.

Authorities who resorted to the use of force are to be held accountable for the loss of life they have caused. The well-being of people who have fled their homes and of those whose homes have been destroyed must be a high priority in the coming days.

We recognize that good relations between neighbours are a gift of God and an obligation of all people. We ask that our member churches pray for the people of Georgia and its neighbours, and for all who in these days work for peace and reconciliation.

Dr William Temu
Acting general secretary
World Council of Churches

The Venerable Colin Williams
General secretary
Conference of European Churches

- **WCC delegation to visit Georgia and Russia, including South Ossetia, 3-7 September 2008**

A pastoral delegation from the World Council of Churches (WCC) will visit Russia and Georgia from 3 to 7 September. The delegation will listen to WCC member churches in both countries, encourage their efforts for peace and visit people displaced by the recent violence as well as church aid programmes.

"We expect this visit to encourage Christians in both countries to keep talking to each other and praying for each other," says Elenora Giddings-Ivory, WCC director of Public Witness and Global Advocacy. "If Christians in Georgia and Russia manage not to allow the divide between their countries to separate them, they may help their governments to move towards a peaceful resolution of the conflict."

The delegation expects to meet with high-level representatives of the Russian Orthodox Church, Georgian Orthodox Church and others. The delegation will visit humanitarian work of Action by Churches Together (ACT) International and its local partners. ACT International is a WCC-backed coordination body for emergency relief.

Members of the WCC delegation are:

- Metropolitan Nifon of Targoviste, Romanian Orthodox Church (head of the delegation);
- Rev. Jean-Arnold de Clermont, Reformed Church of France, president of the Conference of European Churches;
- Rev. László Lehel, director of Hungarian Interchurch Aid, on behalf of ACT International;
- Rev. Elenora Giddings-Ivory, director of Public Witness and Global Advocacy, World Council of Churches;
- Mr Jonathan Frerichs, WCC programme executive (Middle East and nuclear disarmament).

On 12 August, the World Council of Churches and the Conference of European Churches called for prayers and assistance for those affected by the conflict in the Caucasus, expressing alarm and distress at the use of force in the dispute over South Ossetia and Abkhazia.

The ecumenical organizations affirmed the interventions of the Russian Orthodox Church, the Georgian Orthodox Church as well as the Evangelical Baptist Church of Georgia, all of which had called for a ceasefire, a negotiated solution to the conflict and urgent relief for those affected.

"We encourage churches around the world to support these sister churches and the international ecumenical emergency appeal initiated by Action by Churches Together," a joint WCC-CEC statement said.

After a 4,000 km detour, ecumenical delegation to reach South Ossetia

A pastoral delegation sent by the World Council of Churches (WCC) to Georgia and Russia has not been able to visit South Ossetia from the Georgian side of the ceasefire line. Unable to make the half-hour drive to Tskhinvali from within Georgia, they are now traveling thousands of kilometers to reach the enclave from the Russian side instead.

The ecumenical delegation could not get a guarantee of safe passage from the authorities inside South Ossetia. The route should by now be a corridor for aid, but the humanitarian access stipulated by the ceasefire agreement in mid-August is apparently not being honored. Armed groups are accused of acts of violence in the area.

Government and aid officials in Georgia told the WCC group that up to 7,000 ethnic Georgians are still living in South Ossetia under uncertain conditions. Even the Red Cross has largely been denied access, they said, but the Georgian Orthodox Church has limited access to a few of them.

Early in the war, with help from the Russian Orthodox Church, Georgian Orthodox Patriarch Ilia II secured permission to visit a bishop and a few priests and nuns who have stayed in South Ossetia. Since then the church has brought in food and brought out Georgian casualties that were still lying unburied several days after the war.

“We want to express our immense gratitude that you have come in the difficult situation Georgia is facing now,” the Georgian patriarch told the WCC delegation.

“Be assured we are with you at this difficult time,” said Archbishop Nifon of Targoviste, Romania, the delegation head. “We have been following the situation in your country with great sorrow,” said Rev. Jean-Arnold de Clermont, president of the Conference of European Churches. “At the same time, we are greatly impressed by your visit to South Ossetia and by the public declarations in favor of peace by the two Patriarchates of Russia and Georgia.”

“Russia is our neighbour and we should have good relations with it,” Ilia noted.

In Georgia the WCC delegation also met Armenian Orthodox and Baptist leaders, a member of parliament and a government minister responsible for refugees, the country’s public defender, member agencies of Action by Churches Together (ACT) International and displaced people living in camps and schools.

Humanitarian situation

About two-thirds of the 150,000 people displaced into Georgia by the conflict have now returned to their homes. Most of the nearly 50,000 still displaced are housed in school buildings. Even as more durable solutions become urgent, ACT member agencies and local church aid workers told the WCC delegation of many gaps in meeting immediate needs.

“With schools in Georgia scheduled to open in one week, the people we met do not know what will happen next,” said Rev. Laszlo Lehel, director of Hungarian Inter-Church Aid and representing ACT on the delegation. Some 26,000 of these people are from South Ossetia, with little immediate prospect of returning home.

Lia Gogitze, a woman from South Ossetia living in a Tbilisi school, told the delegation, “We lived so well there with our orchards and livestock. It was like a small paradise. Here we share one cup.” Satellite photos show her village, Kemerti, as one of dozens of communities in the enclave heavily damaged by fire in the days since the major fighting ceased.

To visit the enclave the delegation is making a 4,000-kilometer detour via Moscow and North Ossetia. When they reach the South Ossetian capital, Tskhinvali, they will be just 40 kilometers from where they were on their first day in Georgia.

In South Ossetia the ecumenical visitors will meet with church leaders, local officials and the recently displaced residents who have now mostly returned from North Ossetia. Also of concern are the ethnic Georgian residents still thought to be in the enclave after weeks of violence and many reports of looting, arson and forced evictions.

The trip will end in Moscow with visits to the Russian Orthodox Church and the government. In addition to Nifon, de Clermont and Lehel, the delegation includes Rev. Elenora Giddings-Ivory and Mr Jonathan Frerichs from the WCC secretariat in Geneva.

WCC delegation finds deep wounds in South Ossetia, hears healing words in Moscow

The destruction of ethnic Georgian communities in South Ossetia, the deep wounds to local society and war damage to the capital city confronted a delegation from the World Council of Churches on the second half of a 3-7 September pastoral visit to Georgia and Russia. The findings added urgency to concerns raised by government and church officials during a stop in Moscow.

Villages – destroyed house by house – were the first sight the delegation saw as it reached South Ossetia by road from North Ossetia. Entire neighbourhoods are razed, mostly by demolition, by fire, or both. The delegates also saw instances of looting and arson, as well as carloads of people who appeared to be vigilantes. The day of the visit was nearly a month after the end of the war.

South Ossetian representatives vowed to the delegation that they would never return the ethnically shared enclave to its status before the recent war. “We searched for contacts with Georgia,” said Alan Pliev, deputy foreign minister, “but we were sent troops.” The officials made sweeping condemnations of Georgia's leaders and its policies toward the enclave. The “Georgia for the Georgians” campaign of the early 1990s came in for special criticism, as it did in most meetings there and in Russia.

Earlier, deputy foreign minister Grigory Karasin of Russia had stressed the need for peace between ethnic groups "so that South Ossetia and Abkhazia will not be turning their status into uni-ethnic states". Karasin said the leaders of the two regions understand Moscow's concern, but that the Georgian attack on South Ossetia was a blow to inter-ethnic relations in the region.

Satellite photos show the widespread post-war destruction of the villages near Tskhinvali that were mostly ethnic Georgian. The delegation raised the issue with Karasin. He said his government has a team in The Hague to see the facts presented by the government of Georgia. The Russian army had strict instructions to stop the looting, he said.

"Refugees have the right to return. They should come back if they want," Karasin said, adding that the international community "has to create the right conditions for them." He said Georgian behaviour caused Russia's military action in Georgia.

Also in Moscow, an aid official of the Russian church told the WCC delegation, "A joint witness of the Russian Orthodox Church and the Georgian Orthodox Church is critical in this crisis." Margarita Nelyubova a veteran of church aid work in the Caucasus, said "We are not able to work in Georgia because of political constraints, but we want to know how to assist". Nelyubovais a member of the WCC central committee.

The delegation, like aid agencies, had not been able to enter South Ossetia from within Georgia, so members also expressed concern to Karasin about the lack of the humanitarian access promised by Russia in the ceasefire agreement.

The itinerary prepared for the delegation in South Ossetia included meetings with local leaders and visits to war-damaged areas of the city including a hotel where 184 people are staying because their homes were lost during the battle for the city in August.

"We are here to show the solidarity of the world church and to inform our churches of the situation," Rev. Jean-Arnold de Clermont, a French Protestant and president of the Conference of European Churches, told the local officials. Other members of the WCC delegation were Metropolitan Nifon of Targoviste (Romanian Orthodox Church; not in this meeting), Rev. László Lehel (director of Hungarian Interchurch Aid and representing ACT International), and Rev. Elenora Giddings-Ivory and Jonathan Frerichs (WCC executives).

The group mentioned that a Baptist leader in Tbilisi had asked the WCC to "pray for repentance on all sides – for what we have all done wrong. Pray for confession and for reconciliation."

"What do we have to repent of?" replied Sonia Hubaeva, a presidential advisor, adding that her family had suffered abuse and expulsion from central Georgia. The bishop of a locally declared Orthodox diocese, who was also present at the meeting, said that he had witnessed 20 years of violence against Ossetians and that three members of his family had been killed.

On the outskirts of Tskhinvali, the delegation made another attempt to enter the buffer zone around South Ossetia to visit the local metropolitan of the Georgian Orthodox Church, who remains nearby with a few priests and nuns. Russian peacekeepers said they were not able to grant the request. It was the group's second unsuccessful effort to cross the ceasefire line. Thousands of residents reportedly remain in the zone under uncertain conditions.

Germany

- **Tribute to Prof. Dr Carl Friedrich von Weizsäcker, 7 May 2007**

It is with deep sorrow that we received the sad news of the death of Carl Friedrich von Weizsäcker, an untiring, credible and enlightened voice for peace, gifted with deep knowledge of science, philosophy and religion.

Carl Friedrich von Weizsäcker gave decisive impetus to the Conciliar Process for Justice, Peace and the Integrity of Creation which brought churches and people together across the divisions of the cold war during the final two decades of the last century. As a nuclear physicist he knew only too well about the potential destruction of nuclear war. Shortly after the end of the Second World War, he recognized his responsibility as a scientist by taking a public stance against nuclear weapons, for example by working on the World Council of Churches' Commission on Christians and the Prevention of War in an Atomic Age in the 1950s. In this work he pointed to the intrinsic link between peace and justice. During the 1970s he built the issue of protecting creation into this schema, with creation as the living foundation for all life.

Weizsäcker's appeal for an ecumenical peace Council at the Düsseldorf Kirchentag in 1985 will always be remembered:

"We call on the churches of the world to convene a Council for peace. Peace is today the pre-requisite for the survival of humanity. This peace is not secure. At an ecumenical Council, convened for the sake of peace, the Christian churches must collectively issue an injunction that humanity cannot ignore. Time is short."

Carl Friedrich von Weizsäcker's appeal was a decisive factor in publicising and gaining support for the Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation process from the churches. Just a few weeks after his appeal more than 60,000 positive responses had been sent to the headquarters of the German Protestant Kirchentag and there was enormous interest in his book *Die Zeit Drängt* (Time is Short), which was published afterwards. He was one of the main speakers at the first European Ecumenical Assembly in Basel in 1989 and also took part in the World Convocation on Justice, Peace and the Integrity of Creation in Seoul in 1990.

His commitment to interreligious dialogue became even more important in recent years. Carl Friedrich von Weizsäcker was certain that the international situation requires common action for survival on our planet.

We give thanks to God for the life and witness of Professor Dr Carl Friedrich von Weizsäcker and send his family our very deepest sympathy.

Rev. Dr Samuel Kobia
General secretary
World Council of Churches

- **Message from WCC general secretary to “Together for Europe 2007”, an ecumenical gathering of 12,000 Christians, European church leaders and politicians, 10 May 2007**

Ecumenical gathering in Stuttgart reflects a "new Europe", says Kobia

"Together for Europe 2007", an ecumenical gathering to be held 10-12 May in Stuttgart, Germany, has been hailed with "great joy" by Rev. Dr Samuel Kobia, general secretary of the World Council of Churches (WCC). In a message to participants, Kobia expressed his hope that their experience will enable Christians "to continue growing together in a spirituality of unity and love".

Co-moderated by a WCC president, Archbishop Dr Anastasios of Tirana, head of the Orthodox Autocephalous Church of Albania, the event is promoted by more than 170 Christian movements and communities from Catholic, Orthodox, Anglican and Protestant confessions. A number of European church leaders and politicians are expected to participate.

"We have seen the encouraging outcomes of your last meeting: the fruits of the co-operation of Christian communities and organizations in the spirit of unity across the still existing divisions between church families", says Kobia in his message celebrating the encounter.

"Together for Europe 2007", is the second gathering of its kind. The first such meeting in Stuttgart took place in May 2004. This year more than 12,000 Christians are expected to gather from all over Europe. They will celebrate "the vital contribution made to the well-being of the continent by groups, movements and associations that dedicate themselves to tackling exclusion and strengthening social cohesion in Europe's cities and regions", in the words of the organizers.

The meeting in Stuttgart acknowledges and reflects a "new Europe", says Kobia in his message. Europe is "redefining its boundaries" and "beginning to wake up to the

challenges of climate change, water scarcity and the loss of bio-diversity", according to Kobia; Europe, after having "colonized people outside its boundaries in Africa, South America and the Caribbean, in Asia, the Pacific and the Middle East, is now facing the moral obligation of mediating the wars and conflicts and of receiving migrants and refugees".

- **Statement by WCC general secretary offering prayers in commemoration of the fall of the Berlin Wall, 5 November 2009**

Lessons from the fall of the Berlin Wall are relevant today

A time of prayer in commemoration of the fall of the Berlin Wall and all the walls and divisions that are yet to overcome took place next to the pieces of the Berlin Wall in the garden of the Ecumenical Center in Geneva. Twenty years ago in East Germany, "Christian hope and perseverance contributed significantly to the fall of the Berlin Wall", said World Council of Churches (WCC) General Secretary Rev. Dr Samuel Kobia. Commenting on the 20th anniversary of the event that brought to an end the "cold war era", Kobia stressed: the people who "gathered in the churches and became the nucleus for the movement of change [...] taught us that Christian faith can inspire a resistance movement against fatalism and despair – a lesson which is as important today as it was twenty years ago".

The full text of the WCC general secretary comment follows:

Christian hope and perseverance contributed significantly to the fall of the Berlin Wall twenty years ago. A movement that started with prayers and candle light vigils in the Saint Nicolas Church in the centre of Leipzig spread all over East Germany and inspired and encouraged people to confront the power of police and secret service in a very effective and peaceful way. The church in the former German Democratic Republic offered an inclusive space to people in search of freedom and a spiritual home.

When we celebrate today twenty years of the fall of the Berlin Wall, which marked the end of the cold war era, let us remember the faith and the courage of all those people who gathered in the churches and became the nucleus for the movement of change. They taught us that Christian faith can inspire a resistance movement against fatalism and despair – a lesson which is as important today as it was twenty years ago. There are still many walls separating humankind: the "Demilitarized Zone" between North and South Korea, the "Security Wall" on the occupied territory in Palestine, but also the walls of injustice, racism and prejudice that separate rich and poor, stigmatize persons suffering from HIV and AIDS and destroy the lives of many people.

Ireland

- **Public lecture delivered by WCC general secretary on “Hope and the healing of memories” and response to a lecture on “Prisoner abuse: from Abu Ghraib to the passion of the Christ” at the Irish School of Ecumenics, Dublin, Ireland, 30 April-1 May 2007**

Healing wounded memories is an essential feature of the search for Christian unity, World Council of Churches (WCC) General Secretary Rev. Dr Samuel Kobia told participants at a public seminar in Dublin, Ireland on Monday 30 April. A day earlier, in a sermon preached in Edinburgh, Scotland, he affirmed that churches are recognizing that "without each other, none of them is being fully church".

Having just been through the most violent century in human history, humanity is entering the third millennium with lots of wounded memories. That is why, Kobia explained, "Christian unity will become meaningful both to Christians and non-Christians alike if the church takes the lead in healing and reconciling memories".

Speaking at the Irish School of Ecumenics, the WCC general secretary proposed a model of reconciliation that is "not cheap" but entails "an attitude of repentance and a will for reparation". Kobia affirmed that churches "are also called to initiate and promote acts of forgiveness in each place and in all places," for it is forgiveness that creates "the possibility of starting afresh and beginning something new".

To avoid the "inherent danger" that reconciliation be "trivialized and stripped of its fundamental value," churches need to deal with it as both "a theological and a social category". This "integrated approach" must take into account both the biblical understanding of reconciliation and forgiveness and the "sometimes too complex" nature of today's conflicts.

There is no monopoly on Christ's presence

"One key to the search for unity is the discovery that Christ is present in each believer... and in each church," the WCC general secretary told worshippers at Edinburgh's Livingston Ecumenical Parish, the oldest ecumenical parish in Scotland, on Sunday, 29 April. "This awareness is the starting point for the whole ecumenical movement!" he proclaimed.

In spite of the unity that all Christians have in Christ – a unity "from which we cannot escape" – the church "has become divided into a myriad separate churches". According to Kobia, while many of the differences "enrich the body of Christ", others are "destructive divisions".

This is the case when churches "do not recognize baptisms performed by others"; when they "compete in launching mission programmes" or "duplicate programmes and work of

all sorts"; and most notoriously, when their members "cannot share the eucharist with one another".

While divisions "contradict the nature of the church itself as the one body of Christ," churches are called to recognize that "no church has a monopoly on Christ's presence and power," Kobia declared. And shared some examples of churches who are recognizing that "without each other, none of them is being fully church".

We belong to each other

Kobia returned to the theme of reconciliation and collaboration between churches in a meditation during worship at Edgehill Theological College in Belfast, Ireland, on 1 May.

Recalling the response to the tsunami that hit Asia and parts of Africa in December 2004, he highlighted that "churches in the affected countries were among the first to move in to care for the people in partnership with people of other faiths". Churches abroad "ready to support efforts at rehabilitation and reconstruction" joined them, he reported.

"The message was loud and clear: 'If one member suffers, all suffer together with it,'" Kobia said, quoting the Apostle Paul's words. "At all times, not just in times of such a tragedy, we need to recognize that we belong to each other," he added.

Latvia and Estonia

- **Visit of WCC general secretary to Latvia and Estonia, 29 May-2 June 2007**

Latvia and Estonia: post-communist challenges demand new responses from the churches

Perseverance, a cardinal virtue that enabled them to survive decades of Soviet domination, is "no longer enough" for Estonian churches confronting "a newly materialistic and in many ways a 'post-Christian' culture". This view of the current context and challenges to the country's churches was shared by World Council of Churches (WCC) General Secretary Rev. Dr Samuel Kobia with Estonian church leaders in the country's capital, Tallin, on Friday 1 June.

Ecumenical challenges in newly independent post-Communist secularized societies has been the leitmotif of Kobia's 29 May – 2 June official visit to Latvia and Estonia.

Earlier on, addressing Latvian church leaders on Tuesday 29 May in Riga, the WCC general secretary noted that in spite of "strong attempts" to make people leave the church during the Soviet era, "the gospel was not replaced by atheistic propaganda". Rather, the churches remained and, after the fall of communist regimes, even started to grow.

However, he warned, "the collapse of a totalitarian state system did not save churches from other challenges, including secularism, religious relativism and consumerism".

According to Kobia, in the case of Estonia, the churches are facing two major challenges in a country that, "in opening up to free market systems", is experiencing "deep and rapid changes". These are, on the one hand, the "strong individualism and consumerism of market societies" and, on the other, the bi-ethnic composition of the society (Estonian and Russian).

But "You are not the only ones wrestling with these problems," Kobia told his audience of representatives of the Estonian Council of Churches, assuring them that "the worldwide church can accompany you in your efforts for a credible witness of churches in your society".

Explaining that WCC member churches have been working together for ten years on the consequences of economic globalization, he invited the Estonian churches to "join the debate" by participating in the WCC's AGAPE process – an attempt to offer clear analysis and critiques of as well as alternatives to this global phenomenon.

On the need for reconciliation and healing between the country's Estonian majority and Russian minority, "other member churches are confronted with similar challenges," Kobia said. In particular, a WCC Faith and Order Commission study on "Ethnic identity, national identity and the search for the unity of the church" could provide useful insights here Kobia said, while emphasizing that "reconciliation between churches and strengthened ecumenical relationships are vital".

In Latvia, Kobia met the leadership of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Latvia, as well as heads of Orthodox, Catholic, Baptist and Pentecostal churches. Kobia also met with top government officials, including Prime Minister Aigars Kalvitis, and visited the Museum of the Occupation which looks at living conditions under both the Nazi and Soviet occupations between 1940 and 1991.

In Estonia, Kobia's programme included meetings with the leadership of the Estonian Evangelical Lutheran Church (EELC), as well as representatives of member churches of the Estonian Council of Churches.

On 2 June the WCC general secretary attended events celebrating the church's 90th anniversary in Tartu, where he received the First Rank Cross of Merit from the EELC as a sign of gratitude for his contribution to ecumenical work. Also in Tartu, Kobia met with Estonian President Toomas Hendrik.

Meeting with heads of churches in Latvia

Address by Rev. Dr Samuel Kobia, 29 May 2007

Greetings in the name of our Lord, Jesus Christ!

As I was preparing for this visit – the first official visit by a WCC general secretary since 1991 when Latvia regained its independence – I took as my inspiration the section on Latvia in the ecumenical prayer cycle – In God’s Hands – newly revised and updated just this year. Using this ecumenical prayer resource the fellowship of WCC member churches around the world remember you and your churches and pray with you at the same time every year.

One of the prayers in this cycle says “we give thanks for the new life which has emerged from the ashes of communism.” This struck me as I was reading. The last century in the life of your country was not your own. With the exception of a brief period of independence early on, for most of the 20th century you were not governed by your own people and your Christian mission was lived out under foreign occupation.

These years under the Soviet time were characterized by strong attempts to root atheism in society, make people leave the church, encourage the idea that Christianity is out dated and old fashioned and therefore no longer needed. But what happened later was the opposite: the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ was not replaced by the atheistic propaganda. When the communist regimes and parties collapsed, churches remained and started to grow in their membership and active role in society. However, the collapse of a totalitarian state system did not save churches from other kinds of challenges, including secularism, religious relativism and consumerism.

The World Council of Churches is a fellowship of churches which confess the Lord Jesus Christ as God and Saviour according to the scriptures and therefore seek to fulfil together their common calling to the glory of the one God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. The WCC brings together more than 340 churches, representing some 550 million Christians and including most of the world's Orthodox churches, scores of denominations from such historic traditions of the Protestant Reformation as Anglican, Baptist, Lutheran, Methodist and Reformed, as well as many united and independent churches. While the bulk of the WCC's founding churches were European and North American, today most are in Africa, Asia, the Caribbean, Latin America, the Middle East and the Pacific. As you can see, my sisters and brother accompanying me on this trip only give a glimpse of the breadth and diversity of the fellowship.

The primary purpose of this fellowship of churches is to call one another to visible unity in one faith and in one eucharistic fellowship, expressed in worship and common life in Christ, through witness and service to the world, and to advance towards that unity in order that the world may believe.

In seeking *koinonia* in faith and life, witness and service, the churches through the Council:

- promotes the prayerful search for forgiveness and reconciliation in a spirit of mutual accountability, the development of deeper relationships through

- theological dialogue, and the sharing of human, spiritual and material resources with one another;
- facilitates common witness in each place and in all places, and support each other in their work for mission and evangelism;
 - expresses their commitment to diakonia in serving human need, breaking down barriers between people, promoting one human family in justice and peace, and upholding the integrity of creation, so that all may experience the fullness of life;
 - nurtures the growth of an ecumenical consciousness through processes of education and a vision of life in community rooted in each particular cultural context;
 - assists each other in their relationships to and with people of other faith communities;
 - fosters renewal and growth in unity, worship, mission and service.

In order to strengthen the one ecumenical movement, the Council:

- nurtures relations with and among churches, especially within but also beyond its membership;
- establishes and maintains relations with national councils, regional conferences of churches, organizations of Christian world communions and other ecumenical bodies;
- supports ecumenical initiatives at regional, national and local levels;
- facilitates the creation of networks among ecumenical organizations;
- works towards maintaining the coherence of the one ecumenical movement in its diverse manifestations.

Just as we continue to give thanks for the independence you gained shortly before the 21st century, we also give God thanks for the churches here and the new vitality they are experiencing among the people.

Before coming here my staff briefed me on the political situation and the church realities here in Latvia. But what is even more joyful is to be sitting here with you, meeting all together, despite our confessional differences, and have the opportunity to listen to you. I look forward to hearing about your experiences – what you have learned from the past. More importantly, however, I am eager to hear how you are working together as churches for the future as you live out Christ's witness here in Latvia.

Thank you.

Rev. Dr Samuel Kobia
General secretary
World Council of Churches

Meeting with representatives of the Estonian Council of Churches

The role of the church in a secularized society

Address by Rev. Dr Samuel Kobia, WCC general secretary, Tallinn, Estonia
1 June 2007

Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ!

It is indeed a great pleasure to be here with you today. This is my first visit to your country and the first visit of the World Council of Churches general secretary since Estonia became an independent nation. What warms my heart even more is to see all the representatives of Estonian churches gathered here together. Special thanks are due to the Estonia Council of Churches for organizing this gathering. Using the ecumenical prayer resource – In God's Hands – the fellowship of WCC member churches around the world remember you and your churches and pray with you at the same time every year. I am grateful to have this opportunity to visit your country, meet with you and get to know you as part of this Christian fellowship.

1. Perseverance and the challenge of change

Thinking of Christians here in Estonia, one word comes to my mind: perseverance. The Lutheran and the Orthodox churches as well as other smaller Christian communities have survived decades of atheistic propaganda and pressure. People have adhered to the Gospel message despite the long history of foreign domination by powerful neighbors. Those in power while taking control of the land, either tried to instrumentalize the churches or to oppress them. Estonians, however, united by their language, have maintained a strong sense of their own identity. Changing foreign occupation could not destroy this sense of belonging. Thanks to the perseverance of Estonian Christians and the courage of Estonian pastors and priests, churches survived and kept their place in the hearts of many Estonian citizens.

Reclaiming its independence in 1991, Estonia has rebounded politically and economically and has become a member both of the European Union (EU) and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). Estonia has found its place again on the map of Europe. For churches, too, a new phase has begun. It is marked not only by new opportunities, but also by new challenges. Free in their witness and service to the wider society, the churches found themselves confronted with a newly materialistic and in many ways "post-Christian" culture.

Perseverance, which has been the virtue of the churches during decades and even centuries of oppression, is no longer enough. The deep and rapid changes the Estonian society has undergone in opening up to the free market systems of Western Europe and to the influence of global media outlets, require a very different response by the churches. I

am sure that you are very much aware of this reality, which must have been at the centre of deliberations in your synods at national and local levels. I see your invitation to discuss the impact of secularization on societies motivated by this experience.

2. Secularization – an insufficient paradigm for explaining change

Secularization in public life and the individualization of religious beliefs and practices have changed the role and place of the churches over the last centuries especially in Western European societies. It was the experience of the thirty-year's war that led philosophers of the enlightenment to argue for the separation of church and state and the value of secular academic discourse. Various forms of secularization theory have been developed to explain these changes. They have shaped the ways in which churches responded to the situation.

Not long ago, many scholars would claim that religion would necessarily lose out in secularized European societies and even eventually disappear. One of the protagonists of such strong interpretation of secularization theory, the US American social scientist and theologian, Peter L. Berger, has revised his predictions in recent years. He had to admit that religion is surfacing again as an important factor in the life of these societies. This change of mind was not only motivated by the resurgence of religion that became so evident after the terrorist attack on the twin towers of the World Trade Center in New York on 11 September 2001. It also reflected the manifold expressions of religious hopes and desires that were displayed so strongly after the death of Lady Diana in the United Kingdom.

Today many theologians see the shortcomings of secularization and search for new ways to reflect on the role of religion in modern societies. I am convinced that the secularization theory is of rather limited value to explain the changes in Eastern European societies in general and the Baltic States in particular in the period since the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989.

In the last fifteen years, the reality of foreign oppression and decades of atheistic propaganda has been followed by the impact of market values and global media. These factors are shaping perceptions and consciousness of many people in your society. Isn't it true that the post-modern "anything goes" and the strong individualism of market societies have become the main challenges to the Estonian society in recent years?

You are best placed to develop your own tools to interpret and to explain the main dynamics of your society. You cannot rely on borrowed West European or North American concepts for this task. It needs theologians and social scientists from Estonia to work together on the reality you are facing as churches. It should be rooted in the Estonian soil. I would like to invite you to take a fresh look at your society. The secularization theory might not be the best tool to explain the challenges of recent historic changes in Estonia.

I do believe, that you need to struggle today with two major problems that require a clear response by the churches:

- the impact of the push towards strong individualism of free market societies;
- the reality of the ethnic make-up of the Estonian society with an Estonian majority and a Russian minority.

As someone looking at your country from a distance, these are the major challenges in front of you. As churches, what would be your responses to each of these challenges?

3. Economic globalization and its impact on societies

Estonia has rapidly moved towards the European Union and embraced the ideology of the free market. Estonian nationalism has been an important feature of politics here, but so has the desire to belong to the Western world, to the European Union and to NATO. There are many who wanted to believe that both of these tendencies would co-exist in harmony with each other. By now it is clear, however, that the strong individualism of market societies does not match with the sense of belonging and solidarity that motivates the desire to build a new state on the basis of national unity.

Building strong linkages with the European Union and integrating the national economy into the global market has its price. Advertisements of large transnational companies dominate not only the streets of Tallinn, but of many other places in Estonia. Individualism and consumerism are gaining ground among many people, especially the younger people, at the expense of traditional values that embrace life in community and are rooted in the religious traditions of the society.

There are many other churches in Europe and all around the world who struggle with similar problems. It is more than ten years since the World Council of Churches (WCC) began to challenge churches to work together on the consequences of economic globalization and its impact on people and churches. I want to invite you to join this debate, through participation in the AGAPE process, because I believe that it is highly relevant for your churches and your society, and especially for the poor and marginalized.

It is clear that such engagement with economic and political powers, which shape the life of our societies, will never be without conflict. It has been a major task of the WCC to steer the way through these conflicts towards constructive solutions for the people who are suffering economic injustice and environmental destruction. You are not the only ones wrestling with these problems. There are many others who would like to co-operate with you in order to help our churches to engage in constructive ways with the impact of economic globalization. This is one of the issues where the WCC world-wide network of member churches and ecumenical partners can be of benefit to the churches in Estonia.

4. Reconciliation and healing

The other main challenge you are confronted with is the legacy of the past in the considerable and significant presence of the Russian minority in Estonia. This is evident in cities like Johvi or Narva. I remember that this concern was already high on the agenda of your churches twelve years ago. This was the time when the World Council of Churches sponsored a case study on the situation in Estonia through the Theology of Life Programme.

Reconciliation between churches and strengthened ecumenical relationship are vital if the churches are to witness through constructive solutions. Given the wounds of the past, this is not an easy task. But the danger of heightened tensions is real, which makes the task of engaging with this issue an urgent one. Again I would like to invite you to benefit from work done by the WCC with other member churches who are confronted with similar challenges.

Let me draw your attention to a Study on "Ethnic Identity, National Identity and the Search of the Unity of the Church" that might be of interest to you in this context. The report of this Faith and Order study was published as resource for churches in situations of conflict under the title "Participating in God's Mission of Reconciliation".

I also want to invite you to become more involved with the Decade to Overcome Violence (DOV) process. I am sure that the WCC's DOV Office would be happy to cooperate more closely with churches in Estonia. The office is preparing team visits to member churches during the coming years as "Living Letters" from the world-wide church to the local churches of an individual country. If well prepared and with the right composition of the team, such a visit might contribute to constructive efforts to address the problem of ethnic minorities in Estonia.

5. Accompaniment by the worldwide church

The two examples I have chosen, point to different ways in which the world-wide church can accompany you in your efforts for a credible witness of the churches in your society. Through the WCC churches have worked together and engaged in common worship and action. They have strengthened their commitment to grow together according to the prayer of Jesus Christ that all may be one in order that the world may believe (John 17:21). They have been sustained by the assurance that all things will be united in Christ – things in heaven and things on earth (Ephesians 1:10). We have been blessed tremendously during all these years in our search for the visible unity of the church and a common witness to the world.

Let me conclude in expressing my sincere gratitude for the contributions made to our common mission by the churches in Estonia. Since 1989 the Estonian Council of Churches has been an instrument to nurture these links. I praise God that I have now this opportunity to meet with you and to learn more about your life and work in this wonderful country: Estonia.

Thank you very much for your attention.

Romania

- **Greetings from WCC general secretary to delegates and participants in the Third European Ecumenical Assembly, Sibiu, Romania, 5 September 2007**

Your All Holiness
Your Beatitudes
Your Graces
Your Eminences
Venerable Priests, Reverends and Pastors
Ladies and Gentlemen
Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

It is an honour and a privilege to greet the delegates and participants in the Third European Ecumenical Assembly on behalf of the 347 member churches of the World Council of Churches. This is the single largest regular gathering of Catholic, Orthodox, Anglican and Protestant churches leaders in the world. The prayers, reflections, affirmations and the message of this ecumenical assembly will no doubt be a blessing to the churches around the world in their search for visible unity and common witness in Christ. Through the gathering here in Sibiu we are drawn to Christ, whose light shines upon all the Earth.

It is also with a sense of sadness that we have gathered in Romania at a time when we continue to mourn the loss of His Beatitude Teoctist, the beloved patriarch of the Romanian Orthodox Church. Few church leaders have been blessed to give over 70 years of service to the church, and through such turbulent times for their people. We continue to thank God for the life, witness and leadership of His Beatitude Patriarch Teoctist. We shall miss his pastoral presence among us.

Also on behalf of the WCC fellowship of churches in Europe, I would like to thank both the Conference of European Churches (CEC) and the European Conference of Catholic Bishops (ECCB) for their vision and dedication in preparing this event. The cooperation of Roman Catholic, Orthodox, Anglican and Protestant churches is an expression of a regionally viable and coherent ecumenical movement centred on Christ's prayer that we may be one, so that the world may believe. I am eager to see how the continued cooperation among the churches might be strengthened through a common vision and ongoing collaboration, particularly in living out the affirmations of *Charta Oecumenica*.

The theme of this European Ecumenical Assembly is deep with meaning and challenge to the churches and I look forward to the discussions and the deliberations that will take place in the days to come. Indeed, the theme '*the light of Christ shines upon all*' and this affirmation of faith is the source of our '*hope for renewal and unity in Europe*'.

A light shining from the East

The European Ecumenical assemblies of Basel and Graz took place in predominantly Protestant and Roman Catholic contexts. In preparing the Third European Ecumenical

Assembly, the churches of Europe turned their eyes toward the East, bringing us to a predominantly Orthodox context, but also to the context of a renewed Europe – a part of Europe that has been awakened by changes, challenges and growing aspirations. The political and social changes in Europe have brought the churches closer together. Meeting in Romania is a sign of deepening fellowship, helping to heal the many schisms of the church that took place on European soil.

We expect to be strengthened by the spiritual and social witness of the churches gathered here, but also by the diverse witness of the churches in Romania.

A witness for renewal and unity in Europe

This European Ecumenical Assembly comes at a time of rapid integration by which the scars of Europe's past are being healed and the seeds of a common economic and political future are being sewn. This integration is far from being concluded, and indeed new challenges emerge every day. The churches have played a considerable role in providing direction and leadership to the many processes that seek to promote reconciliation and strengthen cooperation in Europe. Now more than ever, the unity of the churches in Europe is needed to bear witness to a future that transcends the vision of a common economic and political future, to embrace a future in which abundant life in Jesus Christ gives hope to all people, everywhere. Never before in history have so many nations attempted such profound integration. The Christ-centred witness of the church in the face of these aspirations will be a source of renewal and unity for the churches in Europe.

We expect to hear the churches of Europe speak with one voice, not only concerning the future of those countries admitted to an integrated Europe, but also the future of people living in all European countries and the future of the millions of immigrants from Asia, Africa, the Americas, the Middle East and the Pacific, living and working in Europe.

A testimony to the world

The light of Christ has shown forth from Europe since the Gospel reached this continent through the Apostles. As the Gospel spread around the world, European Christians played a key role in providing direction and leadership to preserve the traditions of our living faith. Today, the churches of the world look to Europe for fellowship, mutual solidarity and accompaniment. Churches around the world have grown and flourished in the Gospel and they stand ready to accompany the churches in Europe, especially in the face of secularization. They also look to the European churches for a resounding affirmation of the unity we seek and for their witness on the global stage.

We expect to hear a strong testimony of hope rooted in our unity in Christ, signifying that the Roman Catholic, Orthodox, Anglican and Protestant churches gathered here are active, growing in faith and united in their witness to the Gospel.

On behalf of the churches sharing fellowship through the World Council of Churches, I pray that the Holy Spirit will be among us, leading us, challenging us and inspiring us to

see more clearly the ways in which God is calling the One Church to bear witness to or faith in Jesus Christ – the light of the world.

Serbia

- **Letter from WCC general secretary to the Holy Synod of Bishops of the Serbian Orthodox Church about resolving the status of Kosovo, 24 April 2008**

Your Holiness,
Your Eminence,
Your Graces,

We are in receipt of your letter of 27 February 2008 wherein you urge us “to impress upon all interested parties in the international community that the only way to resolve the status of Kosovo is by equitable, constructive dialogue and peaceful negotiations.”

Relative to the same, kindly allow me to inform the esteemed members of the Holy Synod of Bishops that the World Council of Churches has been carefully following and monitoring, when and wherever possible, and reporting on the situation in Kosovo. Most recently, at our meeting of the central committee from 13-20 February 2008 in Geneva, we unanimously adopted a recommendation recalling a “Minute on Kosovo”, previously adopted at our September 2006 meeting. That same “Minute” calls for repatriation and peaceful co-existence as the only way forward to the implementation of “a sustained effort toward an enduring and just peace, while securing freedom and tolerance in a truly multi-ethnic and multi-religious Kosovo”.

Therefore, from that meeting, through the office of the general secretary, the WCC offered its support to the appeal of the Holy Synod of Bishops of the Serbian Orthodox Church, issued at its extraordinary session of 17 February 2008, to its hierarchy, clergy, monastics and faithful to remain steadfast and to abide in peaceful co-existence.

The WCC remains committed to encourage the religious leaders of Kosovo to continue to work toward reconciliation, while offering to ask of all relevant authorities to support these efforts for reconciliation. The WCC will commit itself, in cooperation with the Conference of European Churches (CEC), to monitor the maintaining of human rights and religious freedom, as well as the preservation of religious and cultural patrimonial heritage.

As general secretary, I would like to assure the Holy Synod of Bishops that due consideration will be given in identifying appropriate courses of action. If it is deemed necessary in order to confirm the reality of the situation in Kosovo, perhaps even an ecumenical delegation of “living letters” could be sent to you. In this way we can keep

our member churches informed of further developments and express support internationally for reconciliation and justice.

Sincerely yours in Christ,
Rev. Dr Samuel Kobia
General secretary

- **Letter of condolence from WCC general secretary to His Eminence Metropolitan Anfilohije of Montenegro and Littoral Locum Tenens at the passing away of Patriarch Pavle of Serbia, 16 November 2009**

Your Eminence,

It is with profound sorrow that we were informed of the passing away of Patriarch Pavle of Serbia, the spiritual leader of the Serbian Orthodox Church, one of the most respected Orthodox Primate, a church leader appreciated worldwide for his deep and genuine spirituality, his commitment to peace and reconciliation, his readiness to defend the fundamental Christian values at all costs.

Patriarch Pavle will be remembered as the humble monk who strived all his life for the integrity of life in Christ, who struggled for the up-building of the church and society following the changes in Eastern Europe, who became the messenger of peace and reconciliation during the painful times of war. He has been a real gift to the Serbian Orthodox Church and has inspired many Christians in the world.

On behalf of the fellowship of the member churches of the WCC across the world and on behalf of my colleagues here in Geneva, I convey our most sincere condolences to the hierarchy, the clergy and the faithful of the Serbian Orthodox Church. We do participate in our sisters' and brothers' mourning for the loss of their beloved Primate and spiritual father.

May our common Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of life and resurrection, give rest to his faithful and beloved servant Patriarch Pavle.
May his memory be eternal!

We pray our Triune God, Father, Son and Holy, Spirit, to guide the steps of the Serbian Orthodox Church in their task of electing a successor to Patriarch Pavle, a primate to lead the Church of Serbia, becoming a spiritual guide and leader of the Serbian people in the midst of our contemporary world, full of challenges and thirsty to receive a word of assurance and a word of hope.

Yours in Christ,
Rev. Dr Samuel Kobia
WCC general secretary

Turkey

- **Letter to His Excellency Mr Ahmet Üzümcü, ambassador extraordinary and plenipotentiary, permanent representative of Turkey to the United Nations Office in Geneva, regarding concern about killings and other threats directed at members and leaders of religious minorities in Turkey, 1 May 2007**

Excellency,

We would like to register with your Government our serious concern about killings and other threats directed at members and leaders of religious minorities in Turkey. Like many people in Turkey and beyond, the news of acts of violence causes us deep revulsion. News of threats brings added dismay. The fact that these crimes appear to be motivated by hatred for whole groups of people adds to the sense of alarm in churches and among people of goodwill around the world.

The savage murders of three Christians in Malatya on 18 April are the latest tragedy. Words do not suffice to describe such hateful deaths. The victims and their families have been remembered in prayer in parishes in many countries. Likewise, churches and citizens are watching the authorities in the case to see that justice is done and that further crimes are prevented.

The killing of the Armenian writer, Hrant Dink, is fresh in many minds, as is the vast public display of solidarity by Turkish citizens of all kinds in the streets of Istanbul – a moving tribute to a man of integrity, courage and honour.

We must add to this regrettable list by remembering Father Andrea Santano, the Catholic priest shot in the back at his church in Trabzon last year.

It is disturbing to note that such killings are usually preceded by threats and violence against the individual who is at risk as a member of a religious minority. Accordingly, we note here incidents of this kind reported last year: young men shouting abuses at Syrian Orthodox parishioners in Diyarbakir; protesters disrupting a Greek Orthodox mass at a historic church in Bergama; a Protestant leader in Adana beaten and threatened with death if he did not renounce his faith; a similar group attack on a Catholic friar in Izmir.

"We are deeply sorry for the increase, in recent times, of provocative actions of terror which threaten the peaceful integrity of Turkey," His All Holiness Bartholomew, the Ecumenical Patriarch, said after the latest event, in Malatya.

The explicit condemnation of such killings by government officials including Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan is an important positive factor when it occurs. We are also aware and grateful that your Government supports the freedom of religion stipulated

by the constitution of Turkey. Tolerance among people of different faiths is evident in Turkish society and religion is appreciated as a matter of conscience in accordance with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the European Convention on Human Rights. These and other developments of recent years are building blocks for strategies to reduce hate crimes and enhance human rights.

Yet in recent months there have also been news reports of plots against the lives of the heads of two World Council of Churches member churches in Turkey – His All Holiness Bartholomew, the ecumenical patriarch, and His Beatitude Mesrob II, the Armenian patriarch of Istanbul and All Turkey.

Religious communities that face recurring threats to life and limb also face other unresolved matters concerning the property and services of minorities. The World Council of Churches has periodically taken public note of long-standing governmental claims and actions against church property. These cases prevent church lands and buildings from being used for purposes that include religious education, schooling for children, housing for orphans, and the care and healing of the sick.

In raising these specific issues for Christian churches, your Excellency, we note that the rights of one religious minority are inseparable from the general rights and the well-being of other religious minority groups.

Progress toward addressing these concerns will help to complete a new chapter in Turkey's unique history. Current trends in the Middle East, and between the region and the world, point to the contribution that the nation and society of Turkey can make toward peace in a pluralistic world. Turkey's rich cultural heritage and diversity are an asset in this regard.

The rule of law must be evident, however, through actions at all levels of government. The practice of tolerance must be a public goal.

We look to see respect for human dignity – socially, politically and religiously – reflected in the treatment of churches and other religious minorities.

Acts that lead to violence must be treated by the authorities as serious crimes. Authorities must bring the perpetrators of violence to justice under the law, while also preventing further crimes.

We look to the appropriate governmental authorities to ensure the respect for human rights and for the rule of law which safeguards all citizens, including these whose cases we raise here.

We thank you for your attention, look forward to a response to these important concerns and welcome opportunities for discussion of the same.

Sincerely yours,

Rev. Dr Samuel Kobia
General secretary

cc: His All Holiness Bartholomew, ecumenical patriarch
His Beatitude Mesrob II, Armenian patriarch of Istanbul and All Turkey

- **Letter to His All Holiness Bartolomew I, ecumenical patriarch of Constantinople regarding the challenge to the use of the title “Ecumenical”, 29 August 2007**

Your All Holiness,

“Grace, mercy and peace be with you from God the Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of the Father, in truth and love!” (2 Jn).

Warmest greetings to you from the World Council of Churches. This letter comes from the headquarters of the WCC and the Ecumenical Centre in Geneva as a sign of support in a time of concern for Your All Holiness. It is an expression of the worldwide solidarity that exists among WCC member churches of every continent for the Ecumenical Patriarchate in Istanbul.

We write as a result of recent developments, especially the decision of the Supreme Court of Appeals and subsequent acts by judicial authorities in Turkey which have again challenged your Patriarchate's long-established use of the title 'Ecumenical'. We also recall our letter of May 2007 to the Turkish ambassador in Geneva, when violence and threats against church members there included threats to your person. Please know that amid these troubles you have our firm support in the fulfilment of the Patriarchate's important religious ministries.

The term 'Ecumenical' holds great significance for Christians. It is precious to all who understand the call of churches to affirm life, seek unity and serve their neighbours. It has a unique and historic importance to the world's 300 million Orthodox believers. The title 'Ecumenical' is given only to the Patriarchate of Constantinople, as 'first among equals' among those entrusted with the leadership of the Orthodox world. In consequence and over many centuries, it has become the name by which the Patriarchate is known throughout the world.

Your ecumenical standing was amply recognized when the moderator and officers of the World Council of Churches met in your Patriarchate in Phanar, Istanbul, in December last year. As officers of the world's largest ecumenical organization, they especially noted the historic role of the Ecumenical Patriarchate in promoting fellowship and cooperation among Christian churches and confessional families around the world.

They noted that the Church of Constantinople's "ecumenical" commitment has been tangibly manifested in your Patriarchate's historic standing and its many initiatives:

- A leading role since the earliest centuries of the Christian church with recognition of the title 'Ecumenical' since the 6th century;
- The establishment of relations by the Ecumenical Patriarch Jeremiah with Reformation theologians in Europe in the 16th century;
- The development of relations with the Church of England in the 19th century;
- Becoming the first church in the world to plan for an international ecumenical institution such as the WCC, with the Patriarchal Encyclical of 1920 (at the time when the modern state of Turkey was being formed);
- Bringing together in the name of Christian unity, after centuries of separation, the Primates of the churches of Rome and of Constantinople, including the visit of His Holiness Pope Benedict XVI with Your All Holiness in Phanar, Istanbul, in 2006;
- Facilitating and coordinating theological dialogues between the Orthodox churches, other Christian churches and confessional families, thus creating bridges across denominational borders.

The many "ecumenical" initiatives undertaken by your Patriarchate are not limited to promoting dialogue only among Christians. Your All Holiness has personally become a leading figure of the contemporary ecumenical movement by continuing the long-standing tradition of the Ecumenical Patriarchate and playing an especially active role in the fields of:

Interreligious dialogue and collaboration between Christians, Muslims and Jews, including your emphasis on the multi-religious character of the great city where you live;
Reconciliation among peoples and cultures;

The protection of the natural environment, a matter that is poignantly ecumenical in the current era.

For all these we are grateful. We cherish your leadership in the global ecumenical movement. We are also grateful for the permanent support offered to the World Council of Churches by the Ecumenical Patriarchate.

We wish you to know of our whole-hearted appreciation of the authenticity and importance of the Ecumenical Patriarchate as an institution and the Ecumenical Patriarch as an office within the wider church world.

By copy of this letter member churches of the WCC are being invited to pray for you and to offer other expressions of solidarity. Meanwhile, we note that the Conference of

European Churches has also assured you of their support and intends to raise the present concern at the forthcoming Third European Ecumenical Assembly in Sibiu, Romania.

Finally, we note with satisfaction that, despite the current difficulties, there is also recognition and appreciation being accorded to you and to the Patriarchate from within Turkish society. These sentiments are well placed. They are a credit to the nation.

They are a reminder of the high regard in which many around the world hold the Turkish people. We pray that such positive estimations may be widely heard and clearly understood. We trust that these attitudes will eventually carry the day as a true reflection of the constitution of your country and of the outlook of its people.

Yours in our common Lord,
Samuel Kobia
General secretary

- **Report on visit of ecumenical delegation advocating for religious minorities' rights, 23 – 27 November 2009**

An international ecumenical delegation visiting Turkey at the end of November has encouraged the country's authorities to improve the situation of religious minorities. The exercise of religious freedom, the legal status of churches, including property issues, and the right to religious education were on the agenda.

The five-member delegation representing the World Council of Churches (WCC) and the Conference of European Churches (CEC) visited the Muslim-majority Republic of Turkey on 23-27 November.

In Istanbul, the delegation met with the Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew, with Archbishop Aram Atesian from the Armenian Patriarchate, and with representatives of the Syrian Orthodox community. It also met representatives of the Jewish community. In Ankara, the country's capital city, the delegation met members of the Syrian Orthodox Mor Gabriel Monastery led by their Archbishop Mor Timotheos Samuel Aktas.

Amongst the difficulties faced by churches in Turkey are the non-recognition of the "ecumenical status" of the Ecumenical Patriarch and of his Patriarchate, as well as the obstacles to the re-opening of the Theological School of Halki (Heybeliada). The Armenian Patriarchate reports restrictions to property rights involving several church, school and hospital buildings, as well as neglect and destruction of religious and cultural heritage. The Syrian Orthodox community deplores the dispute over the Mor Gabriel Monastery.

According to the US State Department's Annual Report on International Religious Freedom, there is "substantial abuse of religious freedom in Turkey". The Council of Europe's commissioner for human rights has pointed to shortcomings regarding minorities' cultural and property rights. And a report by the Turkish Economic and Social Studies Foundation has acknowledged that the country is "failing on minority property rights".

The delegation raised the churches' concerns in meetings with Vice-Prime Minister Bülent Arınç; with officials of the Presidency of Religious Affairs, which is the country's highest Islamic authority; and with the president of the National Education, Culture, Youth and Sport Committee of the Grand National Assembly of Turkey.

The Turkish authorities expressed their commitment to enabling all religious minorities in the country to fully exercise their right to freedom of religion. Another issue addressed at those meetings was the role churches and international ecumenical organizations can play to actively assist the country's integration into the European Union.

The same issue featured in a meeting at the headquarters of the daily newspaper *Zaman*, where the delegation discussed with Turkish journalists the role of the media with regard to religious minorities.

Members of the ecumenical delegation were: Rev. Kjell Magne Bondevik, moderator of the WCC Commission of Churches on International Affairs; Rev. Dr Konrad Raiser, former WCC general secretary; Rev. Lena Kumlin, legal adviser on EU affairs to the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland; Rev. Rüdiger Noll, CEC associate general secretary; and Christina Papazoglou, WCC programme executive for Human Rights.

Sweden

- **Message from the WCC to the LWF on the occasion of 60 years common Lutheran witness, Lund, Sweden, 24 March 2007**

"Lord, give me the humility and wisdom to serve the great cause of the free unity of your church."

This prayer, written in 1891 by a young student whose ministry to the church universal would be marked forever by this motto through God's grace-filled response, is a most eloquent example of the vision and commitment to the unity of Christ's Church that has forged a strong relationship between the Lutheran World Federation and the World Council of Churches – a relationship characterized not only by mutual accountability and reciprocity on the journey towards unity, but by the common witness of the member churches in the service of all humanity and to the whole world.

Today, as we participate in the celebration of the 60th anniversary of the Lutheran World Federation, our thoughts turn with gratitude to the pioneers who were so inspired by Christ's prayer for the unity of his followers to have set up signs, marking the way toward greater visible unity and fellowship among Christian churches. The student pioneer who served 'the great cause of the free unity of [the] church' was none other than the late Archbishop Nathan Söderblom, whose memorial bust rests outside the offices of the general secretariat of the World Council of Churches as a constant reminder of the vision we have inherited.

The World Council of Churches deeply values the tireless efforts of the Lutheran World Federation to foster throughout the whole communion a Lutheran identity that is ecumenically committed and open to sharing generously its gifts of spirit and resources with the entire fellowship of churches and a broad circle of ecumenical partners.

Together, as we face the 21st century challenges to ecumenism, the World Council of Churches offers thanks to God for the continued cooperation with and commitment of the Lutheran World Federation. In particular, we count on the Lutheran family of churches to bear witness to a vision for the ecumenical movement that both re-affirms our rich history and also responds to the changing ecclesial and ecumenical contexts of our time. The support of the Lutheran World Federation for a new style of World Council assemblies that offer an expanded space in which to nurture the coherence of the ecumenical movement is one such sign of commitment and vision.

The World Council of Churches also looks forward to continued partnership and even greater collaboration in responding to the most urgent issues facing the churches today. Alongside the prayerful accompaniment and active search for visible unity, the Council looks forward to working together with the churches of the Lutheran World Federation to strengthen the ecumenical response to globalization and economic injustice, HIV/AIDS, violence and the violation of human rights.

On this festive occasion, we should look to the future with confidence, affirming the time has come for the Lutheran World Federation and the World Council of Churches to increase our common efforts to ensure the future of the ecumenical movement by making real our commitment to the formation of young adults – pastors, theologians and lay persons alike. Like Söderblom, many of the pioneer ecumenists were young student leaders. Their energy brought forth the modern ecumenical movement. The same energy is needed today to sustain the movement and to stimulate our quest for the visible unity and witness of the church. The churches are full of young people and it is our shared responsibility to nurture them in leadership for the future.

As the Lutheran World Federation celebrates 60 years of growth in communion and witness, the World Council of Churches rejoices in these achievements and looks forward to a future of even closer collaboration and common witness to the visible unity of the church.

United Kingdom

- **Letter to the member churches of the WCC in the UK regarding Trident nuclear weapons, 9 March 2007**

Greetings to you and to your churches. This letter is going to the WCC member churches in the United Kingdom in view of the Trident nuclear weapons decision now nearing a key vote in the parliament of the UK.

The WCC executive committee last week issued a statement on church vigilance against nuclear proliferation. The statement outlines current threats to the international control of nuclear arms as well as signs of progress such as the recent creation of a new nuclear-weapon-free zone, in Central Asia.

Among its recommendations to member churches and the international community, the executive committee recognizes the recent advocacy for disarmament by UK churches and references the decision facing UK authorities:

"d) *commends* churches in the United Kingdom for their efforts to stop the replacement of the UK's Trident nuclear weapons system and adds the voice of churches around the world in support of that goal.

"e) *urges* the UK government to set an historic example of leadership for the whole international community in the above matter by fulfilling its disarmament obligations under the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty. To do so would effectively challenge the other nuclear weapons states to abandon their own double standards regarding the legitimacy of weapons of mass destruction and would clearly remove an incentive for non-nuclear-weapons states to proliferate." *

We share this action both as an expression of support now and in the spirit of the WCC Assembly "Minute on the Elimination of Nuclear Arms" last year. Perhaps a reminder of international church concern may strengthen last-minute efforts to influence the vote of certain members of Parliament.

From outside the UK, it has been heartening to hear of opposition to the government's Trident plan from churches, from various sectors of society, and from the public at large. A decision to delay the Trident decision would be welcomed in the UK and far beyond. We pray that your government may still be able to respond to this larger and increasingly important framework for its actions. Nuclear affairs are global affairs.

Thank you for the broadly ecumenical public witness that churches in the UK are making in this matter. May it be sustained until the matter is resolved consistent with the spirit and the letter of the NPT. The continued existence of nuclear weapons remains a challenge for churches around the world.

Yours in the Name of the Prince of Peace,

Sincerely yours,
Rev. Dr Samuel Kobia
General secretary

- **Letter to The Rt. Hon. Tony Blair, PC, MP, prime minister of Great Britain, on the bicentennial anniversary of the abolition of the trans-Atlantic slave trade, 16 March 2007**

Your Excellency,

On 25 March 2007, Britain and the Commonwealth will mark the bicentennial anniversary of the abolition of the trans-Atlantic slave trade. Ahead of the official commemorations, Your Excellency described slavery and the global slave trade as "profoundly shameful occurrence...It is hard to believe that what would now be a crime against humanity was legal at the time." Your Excellency's words speak for themselves and are a grim reminder of that gruesome past. The World Council of Churches appreciates your courage to remind people of this tragic part of the colonial history.

Last year many churches in Commonwealth countries as well as in the United States and other European, African and Latin American countries started a process of sharing and exchange of views on how best to contribute to the commemorations of the bicentennial anniversary. The process amongst others discussed the role of the churches and individual Christians in contributing to an environment that justified slavery; it also reviewed the significant role played by the abolition movement. The World Council of Churches has been requested to support the churches in this initiative.

The Elmina Castle in Ghana stands as a symbol of churches failure to denounce slavery as crime against fellow human beings. The castle was built by the Portuguese and Dutch before the British took it over. It is symbolic not only because of the brutality that was perpetuated by the slave trade with all its consequences, but also, of an unjust, unfair system of social, political and economic power that prevailed. Standing in the midst of this colonial architecture the chapel is a sad reminder of the church's role in this evil enterprise.

Around 50 years ago, the renowned British missiologist and ecumenist, Bishop Lesslie Newbigin was appalled to discover that not only was the chapel of this castle built directly over the dungeons, where the slaves were kept in inhuman conditions before being shipped. A hole was cut in the chapel floor by the British who took over the castle from the Dutch. This enabled them, while in prayer, to keep an eye on the captured Africans. Later he wrote: "I am always amazed that these crimes can be so easily forgotten. Ever since that visit I have wished that some representative Englishman – an

archbishop or prime minister – might come to Ghana and go down into that dungeon, kneel down on the floor and offer a prayer of contrition. I still hope it may happen.”⁸⁷

I have shared this story with the archbishop of Canterbury, the Most Rev. Rowan Williams. Perhaps this bicentennial year of the abolition of the slave trade is the right moment to heed Bishop Newbigin’s admonition.

People of African descent in diaspora and in Africa await an unambiguous apology and clear sign from European nations that acknowledges their participation in this terrible part of colonial history. Perhaps under Your Excellency’s leadership the European nations, an integral part of this enterprise could begin a process of truth telling, repentance and reconciliation in order to promote an honest and open dialogue in relation to the scars left on the people as a part of the colonial legacy.

Yours sincerely,
Samuel Kobia
General secretary

⁸⁷ Quoted by Brian Frost, *The Politics of Peace*, London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1991, p 149

Brazil

- **Letter to H.E. Luís Inácio Lula da Silva, president of Brazil, on the quest for social justice and the struggle for freedom, democracy and human rights, 13 December 2007**

Your Excellency,

I am addressing to your Excellency the present appeal, inspired by what we had the honour to hear from you during the 9th Assembly of the WCC, held in Porto Alegre, Brazil, 14-23 February 2006. In your message to the Assembly, you had strongly affirmed the role of the WCC and the need to continue together our journey in the path of social justice and the quest for human dignity: “I wish to highlight here the important role that the WCC has in combating hunger and poverty throughout the world; this means that we are continuing today as closely as we did in the past, in the quest for social justice, struggling for freedom, democracy and human dignity. All of us here believe that spiritual strength is indispensable in order to foster indefatigable individual and collective militancy, in solidarity, for the common good. Minds, hearts and willing hands that share values of love and respect for others are certainly essential for building a kingdom of justice in this world of inequalities.” (cf. Official Report of the Ninth Assembly of the World Council of Churches, 2007, p.356).

Inspired to a very large extent by your message, the Assembly adopted a statement entitled “Water for life” which said that water is a symbol of life. The Bible affirms water as the cradle of life and expression of God’s grace in perpetuity for the whole of Creation (Gen. 2: 5).

Furthermore, before the Assembly, the WCC together with the National Council of Christian Churches of Brazil (CONIC) and the Roman Catholic Conference of Brazilian Bishops (CNBB) invited together with the Federation of Swiss Protestant Churches, WCC participants for a meeting on water struggles in Brazil. Brazilian and Swiss churches had issued a joint ecumenical declaration on the right to water the year before and were eager to share this excellent example of ecumenical co-operation (please find the text of the Declaration at: <http://www.oikoumene.org/index.php?id=2611>). During this meeting information on the diversion of the São Francisco River was also received.

As access to water is at the heart of an important dissension in today’s Brazil, we are deeply saddened by the impasse that has led to the hunger strike currently in process by the Roman Catholic Bishop Luiz Cappio and are extremely worried about his deteriorating health. We wish to express our solidarity to Bishop Luiz Cappio who after two years of frustrated attempts to establish a dialogue between social movements and the

Brazilian government to discuss the controversial São Francisco River diversion project has chosen this radical non-violent action and has resumed his hunger strike on 27 November. This is the way of protesting against the river diversion project which entails serious ecological and social consequences.

We therefore join the concerns expressed by the WCC's member churches and ecumenical partners in Brazil, and we amplify the voice of the National Council of Churches in Brazil (CONIC) as we appeal to your Excellency personally to withdraw the Brazilian army from the project's construction site and re-establish a dialogue between social movements, churches and the government. We appeal for a democratic discussion on the São Francisco River diversion project and for the consideration of a number of effective alternatives, as those proposed by a study carried out by the National Water Agency (ANA).

The world-wide fellowship of churches constituting the WCC lift their prayers for Bishop Cappio, the people of this Northeast section of Brazil as well as for the political leadership that must bring arbitration to resolve this dilemma.

We pray that all hearts will be softened to be open to the needs of the most affected and vulnerable populations.

In faith,
Rev. Dr Samuel Kobia
General secretary

Chile

- **Letter to H.E. Michelle Bachelet, President of the Republic of Chile regarding justice for the Mapuche People, 8 February 2008**

Your Excellency,

Greetings from the World Council of Churches.

The World Council of Churches (WCC) is the broadest and most inclusive among the many organized expressions of the modern ecumenical movement, a movement whose goal is Christian unity for a world of peace, justice and life for all.

It is this vision of the world that has compelled the churches in the WCC to be in solidarity with the Indigenous Peoples who continue to suffer discrimination and exclusion even in the 21st century. Its engagement is guided by:

- the recognition of the need to clarify issues of denial, destruction and denigration of Indigenous spiritualities and ancestral values;
- the affirmation of Indigenous Peoples' right to reclaim what has been denied them and threatened with destruction – their culture, identity, language, cultural symbols, ancestral land, burial grounds;
- respect for the Indigenous Peoples' right to define for themselves their political, economic, cultural and spiritual development;
- the affirmation of the churches' responsibility to promote awareness of the issues and concerns of Indigenous Peoples;
- the affirmation of the important role of education in developing an understanding of and commitment to the struggle of Indigenous Peoples; and
- an appreciation of Indigenous wisdom and the distinct contribution Indigenous Peoples can make to the development of new approaches, methodologies and tools, which churches can use in their work in the area of education.

It is in this spirit that the WCC supports the just cause of the Mapuche people, who are asking for i) the de-militarization of their territory; ii) the repeal of the Anti-terrorist Law, and iii) the liberation of Mapuche political prisoners. In an effort to highlight the need to address these concerns which are crucial for the liberation and safety of the Mapuche brothers and sisters, Patricia Troncoso went on a hunger strike which lasted over 100 days.

We urge you to consider their demands as mentioned above and ensure an environment where they could survive as a people free from fear and harassment. Together with the prophet Isaiah and in accordance with the values for which your government stands, we urge that justice is ensured to the Mapuche people and their legitimate rights and aspirations are upheld. As Christians we believe that “for as the earth brings forth its shoots, and as a garden causes what is sown in it to spring up, so the Lord God will cause justice and praise to spring up before all the nations” (Isaiah 61:11).

Gratefully yours,
 Rev. Dr Samuel Kobia
 General secretary

Colombia

- **Message from the director of CCIA on the liberation of Colombian hostages, 14 January 2008**

The WCC shares the joy of the liberation of Clara Rojas and Consuelo González. This is a sign of hope that shows that a negotiated solution to the situation in Colombia is possible.

The WCC congratulates President Hugo Chavez for his efforts in the mediation process as well as the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) for his collaboration in the operation and calls the government of Colombia and the FARC to look for peaceful ways of ending the long lasting violent conflict.

As stated in numerous occasions the WCC shares strongly the conviction that a negotiated solution is imperative so as to overcome the violence that has ravaged the country for decades and to open the way to a democratic and peaceful resolution of the current stalemate. The civil society has suffered the most as has been caught in the middle of the conflict with hundreds of civilians victimized by the on-going military operations.

A humanitarian agreement is still possible and urgent to put an end to the hostage situation. The WCC continues to praise the efforts made by the churches in Colombia and the civil society in general to look for peaceful means to bring justice and reconciliation to the country.

Rev. Elenora Giddings-Ivory

- **Open comment by WCC general secretary expressing joy at the release of Ms Ingrid Betancourt and other hostages but also calling for the release by the FARC of other hostages still held, 3 July 2008**

The World Council of Churches (WCC) shares the joy of the liberation of Ms Ingrid Betancourt as well as other hostages in Colombia. When the whole world witnesses the happiness of Ms. Betancourt, her children, family and friends we can rejoice while still remembering the hundreds of people who are still hostages of the FARC.

The detention of these people is an unacceptable situation which should be reverted immediately. Hostage taking should have no place in the processes of social and political transformation. The WCC calls the FARC to release hostages on a humanitarian basis and reiterates its call to President Uribe and the FARC to look for a peaceful solution of the conflict in Colombia.

During the many decades of the conflict thousands of Colombian people have died because of the confrontation. Among them many civilians who were victims of this war. All over the world there is a call to stop this violence.

The WCC welcomes the mediation efforts done by the governments of France, Switzerland, Spain, Ecuador and Venezuela. The liberation of Ms Betancourt should not stop these efforts but strengthen them to achieve peace with justice in Colombia. We welcome this liberation as an important step in a yet uncompleted process.

Rev. Dr Samuel Kobia
WCC general secretary

Cuba

- **Letter to The Hon. Condoleezza Rice, US secretary of state, regarding Cuban citizens imprisoned in the U.S., 23 May 2007**

Dear Secretary Rice,

Recently at the headquarters of the World Council of Churches in Geneva we received a visit by Adriana Pérez Oconor and Olga Salanueva, the spouses of Gerardo Hernández and René González, respectively, who, as you know, are Cuban citizens imprisoned in the US.

As we have expressed before, the WCC will continue to offer pastoral accompaniment to the relatives of the five Cuban citizens imprisoned, and will advocate for their relatives' right to visit them. They once again requested the WCC's intervention to facilitate the issuing on humanitarian grounds of temporary visas, which have been denied by the US authorities on numerous occasions.

One of the outcomes of our meeting was a request for me to send you a letter kindly asking your mediation to have their visas granted.

Urgent action is needed in this regard as the appeals process is taking longer than expected and its outcome is highly uncertain. For this reason the prisoners, as well as their wives, need at the very least to be able to see each other and receive pastoral accompaniment in these difficult and uncertain circumstances.

We thank you in advance for all your efforts to achieve these important goals.

Gratefully yours,
Rev. Dr Samuel Kobia
General secretary

- **Letter to Rev. Robert Edgar, general secretary of the National Council of Churches in Christ in the USA, regarding Cuban citizens imprisoned in the US, 23 May 2007**

Dear Brother Bob,

“Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ” (Eph. 1:2).

Recently in Geneva we received a visit by Adriana Pérez Oconor and Olga Salanueva, the spouses of Gerardo Hernández and René González, respectively, two of the five Cuban citizens imprisoned in the US, known as the “Cuban Five”.

As we have expressed before, the WCC will continue to offer pastoral accompaniment to the relatives of the "Cuban Five", and will advocate for their relatives' right to visit them. They once again requested the WCC's intervention to facilitate the issuing on humanitarian grounds of temporary visas, which have been denied by the US authorities on numerous occasions.

One of the outcomes of our meeting was a request for me to send you a letter kindly asking you to once again contact influential people in the USA (members of the Congress, etc.) with a view to getting their visas granted. We would also greatly appreciate it if you would contact churches which could accompany the process through visits to the five prisoners, both individually and together with their relatives.

I also intend to write a letter to Secretary of State, Condoleezza Rice, requesting her mediation to have their visas granted.

Urgent action is needed in this regard as the appeals process is taking longer than expected and its outcome is highly uncertain. For this reason the prisoners, as well as their wives, need at the very least to be able to see each other and receive pastoral accompaniment in these difficult and uncertain circumstances.

We thank you in advance for all your efforts to achieve these important goals.

Gratefully yours,
Rev. Dr Samuel Kobia
General secretary

- **Letter from WCC general secretary to the Hon. Condoleeza Rice, US secretary of state, asking that the Cuban government be permitted to purchase construction materials and food in the USA following the hurricanes and tropical storms which had recently hit the region, 17 September 2008**

Dear Secretary Rice,

Greetings from the World Council of Churches (WCC).

The WCC is the broadest and most inclusive among the many organized expressions of the modern ecumenical movement. More than five hundred million people from over three hundred and forty churches come together to build a movement whose goal is Christian unity for a world of peace, justice and abundant life for all.

It is this vision of the world that has compelled the churches in the WCC to be in solidarity with people who are suffering for various reasons, including the effects of natural disasters.

As you are aware, some areas of the Caribbean region and the USA have been severely damaged in August and September by several hurricanes and tropical storms, particularly by Hurricanes Gustav and Ike.

One of the most devastated countries has been Cuba. Even if it is receiving support from other countries, as well as from churches and ecumenical organizations, Cuba needs further help. For this reason, we are kindly requesting your Office to provide the necessary authorization for the Cuban government to purchase construction materials and food in the United States of America.

Beyond ideological or political differences, we are appealing for your help on the grounds of humanitarian need and, furthermore, of our Christian faith which is concerned with the fullness of life for every human being.

We pray and hope that the State Department will grant this authorization for the well-being of the Cuban people while saving lives and reducing their suffering.

Gratefully yours,
Rev. Dr Samuel Kobia
General secretary

- **CCIA calls for churches around the world to establish or further develop partnerships with Cuban churches and stressed the need for the USA to lift the blockade of Cuba, 15-20 March 2009**

Will the global financial crisis mark the end of "moneytheism"?

No doubt the global financial crisis is and will continue impacting negatively all regions of the world, but according to an advisory body of the World Council of Churches (WCC) it also represents an opportunity to deeply transform the international financial system for good.

The commission discussed the global financial crisis at its 15-20 March meeting in Matanzas, Cuba. The 30-strong commission provides WCC member churches and affiliated ecumenical organizations with a platform for information-sharing and joint advocacy on critical situations and on opportunities to support initiatives for peacemaking, justice and overcoming poverty.

Meeting in the Caribbean island that has endured a half century long unilateral economic embargo by the United States, the CCIA has stressed the need for the US to lift the blockade and for the establishment of an unconditional dialogue between both governments.

Impressed by the vitality, vibrancy and enthusiasm of the Cuban churches, as well as their contribution to the political, economic, social and cultural life of the country, the CCIA members called on churches around the world to establish or further develop partnerships with Cuban churches, as an expression of solidarity and for mutual learning.

Honduras

- **Message from an international ecumenical team encouraging the churches in Honduras to “accompany the people in their search for peace with justice and the re-establishment of democracy”, Tegucigalpa, Honduras, 7 August 2009**

“If one member suffers, all suffer together with it...” (I Cor 12:26a). With these words of solidarity, we greet you in the name of Jesus Christ.

As a “Living Letters” delegation of the World Council of Churches (WCC) and the Council of Latin American Churches (CLAI), we visited Honduras in the wake of the June 28 coup d’état to listen, accompany, learn and share the suffering and the hope that the Honduran people are living at this time. We met with representatives of various churches, diverse sectors of civil society, and with people engaged in politics. Here are the “words of encouragement” (Acts 13) that we direct to you at the end of our visit.

A worthy and dignified people who choose the paths they wish to follow

We encountered a worthy and dignified people who demonstrate maturity, who call out for justice and who do not accept the imposition of a de facto government. The response of the people in the face of the coup d'état was immediate and massive, a proposal for peaceful protest. This stirring of Honduran women and men is the consequence of decades of work by and among popular movements, churches and various sectors of society to augment the participation of the people in the decisions that most affect them.

We listen mutually and make other voices heard

Our visit enabled brothers and sisters of different traditions to meet with us and with each other to share their witness of the complex situation that is lived today in Honduras. These were sacred moments of listening to each other in profound ways that made it possible to share the same pain and sentiment. We hope that the churches and their leaders may continue to meet among themselves to strengthen the spaces that have been created. As one participant in a meeting affirmed, "a burden shared is lighter." Another challenge is to be heard as churches of resistance, and to raise up voices that are very distinct from the voices that have predominated in the major communications media in recent weeks in this country. It is urgent that Christian voices be heard that are raised in defence of human rights and in support of humanitarian actions that respond to the lack of respect and the violence that has intensified with the passage of days.

End the repression, return to constitutional order

Together with the Honduran people in resistance, and with all of the governments of our hemisphere, we call for the re-establishment of the constitutional order as soon as possible so as to prevent continued execution of orders of repression, arrests, forced disappearances and violence directed against the population and especially against women. "*Women who were taking part in the resistance in the zone of Comayagua were captured and assaulted. Some fled by the rivers and the mountains. Those who were captured were taken by the police. More than 100 women in a small cell.... They were beaten; arms and collarbones were broken; their clothes were taken from them, leaving them naked among men*" (testimony received). Like all of the people of Honduras, we do not wish to see a return to the violence that was lived in the 1980s. We congratulate President Manuel Zelaya for his acceptance of the San José Accord, and we thank President Oscar Árias for his efforts to seek a peaceful solution to the conflict. We call on the de facto government to accept the Accord as well. With the return of President Zelaya, the way is opened once again for the possibility of holding free and legal elections, which is to say within the framework of the constitution. The social movements will have the opportunity to continue organizing and acting without the present repression.

Religious expressions in favour of peace with justice and life with dignity

"*For anyone who has known Jesus even slightly, this situation has touched us. How do we focus on the message of peace with justice?*" (a church member present in a meeting). We encourage the churches to recover, from within their respective traditions, the inspirations that will most help them to contribute to the strengthening of dignity and the construction of the fullness of life in the present context of Honduras. May they, with

love and responsibility, accompany the people in their search for peace with justice and the re-establishment of democracy.

This moment demands a friendly, pastoral presence. This presence can be shown in diverse forms. We share the following suggestions that emerged in our encounters with churches:

- a) Celebration of vigils in communities, congregations and ecumenically.
- b) Organization of public ecumenical events that give witness to the testimony of the presence of different churches in the midst of the people. It's important that other church voices be heard.
- c) "It is the time to walk with the people," said some whom we met. One group of churches took on the challenge of supporting a march, identifying themselves as church, and serving the people in their needs, offering water, food and lodging to those in need.

Heal wounds, build the society that is dreamed of

As a consequence of the political events, the need to heal wounds and to seek reconciliation becomes apparent. We can see in the midst of the darkness the presence of small lights. A new time approaches and it is necessary to be prepared to build that country which for many years the Honduran people have been dreaming of and working toward. *"Then your light shall break forth like the dawn, and your healing shall spring up quickly. Your vindicator shall go before you, the glory of the Lord shall be your rearguard"* (Is. 58:8).

In the months and years to come, we can foresee that, in the face of the need for change that is expressed by the people, calls will emerge once again for a national dialogue and/or a constituent assembly. We hope that these efforts will be carried out with the authentic participation of all sectors, and not only those who have traditionally maintained themselves in power.

The Word of God speaks clearly to us of God's will: that all creatures live in fully enjoyment of creation and have life in abundance. In this hope, we call on all of the churches not to resign themselves to accepting the present situation, to listen with renewed attention to the Word, to accompany all people who suffer and to practice solidarity with those in greatest need.

May this message reach your hearts, filling them with the strength and tenderness of the Spirit.

Noemí Madrid de Espinoza, vice-moderator, Commission of the Churches on International Affairs, World Council of Churches, and administrative rector of the Theological Community of Honduras

Jim Hodgson, United Church of Canada

Rev. Alfredo Joiner, Mesoamerica regional secretary, Council of Latin American Churches

Silvia Regina de Lima Silva, Ecumenical Department of Research (DEI), Costa Rica

- **Letter to H.E. Mr Ban Ki-moon, UN general secretary, regarding human rights violations, 15 September 2009**

Your Excellency

Dear Mr Secretary General,

I extend to Your Excellency warm greetings from the World Council of Churches (WCC) in Geneva, Switzerland.

We have been following with great concern the developments in Honduras in the aftermath of the coup d'état staged on June 28. Among our concern is the human rights violations by the de facto government, and the serious consequences this has had on the lives of the people of Honduras.

A "Living Letters" international ecumenical team visited Honduras on behalf of the WCC and the Latin American Council of Churches (CLAI) between 2 and 7 August, 2009. Living Letters teams are small ecumenical delegations which visit a country to listen, learn, pray for peace and share approaches to overcome violence. They are organized in the context of the WCC's Decade to Overcome Violence in preparation of the International Ecumenical Peace Convocation that will be held in Kingston, Jamaica, in May 2011.

At the end of the visit, the delegation issued a "Message to the Churches of Honduras, Latin America-Caribbean, and the world", encouraging the churches in Honduras to "accompany the people in their search for peace with justice and the re-establishment of democracy", which we have shared with those churches.

The message also urges "the re-establishment of the constitutional order as soon as possible", and "the return of President [Manuel] Zelaya" in order to hold "free and legal elections [...] within the framework of the constitution". We therefore share with you these concerns, requesting that further efforts be made by your good offices to re-establish democracy in the country as a significant step towards correcting the political anomaly occasioned by the coup d'état.

Very gratefully yours,
Rev. Dr Samuel Kobia
General secretary of the WCC

Egypt

- **Visit of a WCC delegation to Egypt to learn about the situation of churches in the country and to discuss WCC activities in the Middle East, specifically promoting a just peace and interreligious dialogue, 16-21 June 2008**

Egypt visit to highlight WCC Middle East focus

The necessity of peace in the Middle East will be highlighted during a 16 to 21 June visit to Egypt by the World Council of Churches (WCC) General Secretary Rev. Dr Samuel Kobia.

During encounters with leaders of WCC member churches as well as other religious and secular figures in Cairo and Alexandria, a WCC delegation led by Kobia will learn about the situation of the churches in Egypt and discuss WCC activities in the Middle East.

Impetus for the talks comes from the Amman Call, a document about how churches must commit to working for peace in the Middle East. The document was signed by over 130 representatives of churches and Christian organizations from six continents in June 2007. The document includes a commitment of the churches to work for peace in the region and to observe three guiding principles: the ethical and theological imperative for a just peace; the ecumenical imperative for unity in action; and the Gospel imperative for costly solidarity.

The visit will be an occasion to promote interreligious dialogue, especially among institutions of religious education. In this spirit, the delegation will meet Muslim leaders and pay a visit to the Al-Azhar University in Cairo.

The promotion of a just peace in the Middle East has been a focus of WCC work during the last several years. The visit to Egypt comes 7 days after a worldwide "week of action" for peace in Israel and Palestine initiated by the WCC. Previous visits had brought the WCC General Secretary to Lebanon, Syria and the Gulf region as well as to Israel and Palestine since 2007.

Members of the WCC delegation visiting Egypt:

- Rev. Dr Samuel Kobia, WCC general secretary
- Mr Guirguis Saleh, Middle East Council of Churches general secretary
- Ms Sophia Shokry, WCC commission on youth in the ecumenical movement (ECHOS) member
- H.G. Bishop Gregorios of Mesaoria, Church of Cyprus
- Mr Michael Spyrou, Church of Cyprus

- Ms Carla Khijoyan, WCC programme consultant for Ecumenical Solidarity and Regional Relations

Church unity and interreligious dialogue discussed at WCC visit to Egypt

Challenges facing Christians today are too strong for a divided church, said World Council of Churches (WCC) general secretary Rev. Dr Samuel Kobia in Egypt recently as he called for church unity both locally and globally. Kobia was speaking during a 16-21 June visit to WCC member churches in the country.

Among the most urgent challenges for Middle Eastern churches are the regional peace process and the migration of Christians, both of which are addressed by the 2007 Amman Call, a document in which some 130 representatives of churches and Christian organizations from six continents agreed on guiding principles for their work in the region.

A WCC delegation led by Kobia was welcomed to Egypt by the Metropolitan Bishop of Damiette, from the Coptic Orthodox Church. He greeted the visitors on behalf of Patriarch Pope Shenouda III who was abroad for health treatment.

The group met Rev. Dr Safwat al Bayady and chairpersons of the different councils of the Evangelical Presbyterian Church of Egypt, also known as the Synod of the Nile. Kobia expressed appreciation of the Synod's contribution to the ecumenical work in the country.

The WCC general secretary greeted the Faith and Order Standing Commission, whose members were meeting in Cairo from 16-22 June. The delegation attended a session of the Commission, in which they discussed a study project on moral discernment.

The WCC delegation as well as the members of the Faith and Order Standing Commission was received by Pope Theodoros II, Greek Orthodox Patriarch of Alexandria and All Africa. Pope Theodoros bestowed on Kobia the Cross of the Patriarchate and congratulated him upon his contribution to the WCC. Kobia will be leaving the WCC at the end of 2008.

Interreligious dialogue must aim to preserve human dignity

The delegation met the Grand Sheikh of Al Azhar University and Grand Imam of Al-Azhar Mosque Dr Mohammad Sayyed Tantawy with whom they discussed the prospects for Christian-Muslim dialogue. "An accurate mutual understanding of religions can only be achieved if Christians and Muslims see each other as human beings rather than as representatives of different faith groups," said Kobia.

Tantawy briefed the delegation on cultural and interreligious dialogue initiatives between the Coptic Orthodox, Anglican and Roman Catholic churches and the Al Azhar Mosque, considered by many one of the most influential Sunni Muslim institutions. "Preserving human dignity and procuring a safe environment for living together should be the aim of all interreligious dialogues", Tantawy said.

The Minister of religious affairs Dr Mahmoud Zakzouk met the delegation and emphasized the importance of communication in order to modify negative perceptions of Islam. "Islam is a religion of love, respect and peace; we reject all aspects of violence", stated Zakzouk.

In turn, Kobia emphasized the role of interreligious dialogue in overcoming misunderstandings and prejudices. "Christians and Muslims form together more than 55% of the world's population. If we find ways of dialogue and we live peacefully together then we will contribute to global peace", he said.

For this goal to be achieved, Kobia and Zakzouk agreed, interreligious dialogue cannot be confined to leaders, scholars and intellectuals only. Ordinary people living in interreligious settings need to be involved in interreligious dialogue if this is to have an impact on people's lives.

A meeting with the secretary general of the League of Arab Nations, Amro Moussa was an opportunity to discuss a possible cooperation in the search for peace and justice in the Middle East and in Palestine/Israel in particular.

Members of the WCC delegation that visited Egypt:

- Rev. Dr Samuel Kobia, WCC general secretary
- Mr Guirguis Saleh, Middle East Council of Churches general secretary
- Ms Sophia Shokry, WCC commission on youth in the ecumenical movement (ECHOS) member
- H.G. Bishop Gregorios of Mesaoria, Church of Cyprus
- Mr Michael Spyrou, Church of Cyprus
- Ms Carla Khijoyan, WCC programme consultant for Ecumenical Solidarity and Regional Relations

Iran

- **Minute on Iran and the Middle East Regional Crisis by the WCC executive committee, Etchmiadzin, Armenia, 25-28 September 2007**

In repeated statements over many years, the World Council of Churches has called for governments to exercise their responsibilities for bringing peace with justice to the peoples of the Middle East. Yet today – from Iraq to Lebanon to Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territories – unresolved conflicts are scarring the region. The lives of countless women, children and men are shattered, families are torn apart, and whole communities are held hostage to injustice and violence.

Increasingly, the prospect for peace in each place is linked to progress toward peace across the whole region. Just and durable solutions to the violence and instability in Iraq, Israel/Palestine and Lebanon will require constructive shifts in governmental policies

across the region and internationally, most especially in the cases of Iran, Israel, Syria, Lebanon and the United States, as well as the other foreign powers involved.

Threats to begin another war in the Middle East defy the lessons of both history and ethics. We refer to the belligerent stance of the US toward Iran and of Iranian threats against the US and Israel. The region and its people must not suffer another war, let alone one that is unlawful, immoral and ill-conceived once again.

Disputes will yield to good faith negotiations, now as in the past. The success slowly emerging from US-North Korean and the six-party talks is a relevant example. Multi- and bilateral approaches are necessary in the regional crisis affecting the Middle East as well. Churches in the region and beyond are looking for new levels of courage and accountability for peace from the governments involved, including:

i. US-Iranian and multi-party negotiations to settle outstanding nuclear issues as well as achieve a *modus vivendi* regarding the respective national interests in Iraq and the wider region. This must include Iranian compliance with International Atomic Energy Agency and United Nations Security Council directives and US adherence to its 1995 pledge against nuclear weapons use against non-nuclear signatories of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty including Iran (Executive committee, Bossey, 2006).

ii. Israel, Iran and their respective allies taking steps to reduce the threatening postures of Israel and Iran, including Israel's prompt and unconditional accession to the NPT as called for by the UN General Assembly and the full compliance of Iran noted above (Executive committee, 2006).

iii. Initiatives by Israel, its neighbours and the parties to the Arab Peace Initiative, by the US, the European Union, Russia and the United Nations to finally end the 40-year occupation of Palestinian territories and establish a viable Palestinian state in East Jerusalem, the West Bank and the Gaza Strip in accordance with the relevant UN resolutions.

iv. Return of the Golan Heights to Syria as part of a comprehensive Syrian-Israeli accord that resolves *inter alia* outstanding issues for both countries in respect of the sovereignty of Lebanon.

v. Reversing the recent trend in the West and among Western allies in the region to focus on and promote Sunni-Shia differences, including marked reductions in international and regional transfers of arms to Sunni and Shiite groups.

vi. The withdrawal of all US forces from Iraq and the implementation of alternative Iraqi and multilateral political, economic and security programs (Central committee, Geneva, 2005).

Resolving these regional problems, especially those that have become *causes celebres* across the Muslim world and beyond, is essential for ending the current spiral of violence

in Iraq, Lebanon and Israel/Palestine. Non-state armed groups will continue to find resources, recruits and opportunities to use violence against US, Israeli and Iraqi targets unless these issues are addressed.

Recommendation:

A. Member churches of the WCC are urged to impress upon their governments their acute concern that the US and its allies must settle the dispute over Iran's nuclear programme through negotiations and not through the use of military force. Governments should also be encouraged to convey this international church concern to the US and its allies.

B. This international church position against attacking Iran seeks protection for all the populations involved, including the US and Israeli publics. Years of unilateralist military incursions in the Middle East have compromised human security and national well-being across the region and left many people vulnerable.

C. The position also reflects the churches' conviction – in an age impatient for new and shared solutions to global problems – that negotiated solutions are the only path to peace for the Middle East and for a world increasingly destabilized by the regional crisis there.

Iraq

- **Statement of WCC general secretary on the fourth anniversary of the war in Iraq, 15 March 2007**

Seek peace and pursue it. (1 Peter 3:10)

Blessed are the peacemakers as they shall be called children of God. (Matthew 5: 9)

A fundamental Christian belief is that God has made us and all creation and requires us to seek peace with justice. The church must work for a world where none need live in fear and every life is sacred. Through God's grace, we witness to our faith with love and hope for all humankind. As the WCC executive committee noted at the peak of the Cold War:

"The churches must speak out against the tendency to resume perilous tactics of brinkmanship. Claims by any nation to become strongest at any cost should be deplored. Churches should make clear in no uncertain terms that perspectives of foreign policies can no longer be seen in terms of 'liquidating the enemy' (be it politically, militarily or through economic and cultural pressure). Peace requires willingness on the part of deferring political and social systems to co-exist and co-operate with each other". WCC executive committee, "Threats to Peace", February 1980

These are prophetic words of wisdom that I recall as I reflect on the fourth anniversary of the war in Iraq. These have been difficult years of pain, rancour, disappointment and loss. During the military intervention in Iraq, appeals for restraint by large sections of the church and civil society as well as the international community were ignored with contempt and disdain. Political brinkmanship and the arrogance of power triumphed over reason and good sense. As a result, Iraq today is in turmoil and disarray, and there are strong indications that the country may fragment, creating greater chaos and human suffering.

In the war in Iraq, the international community saw gross and persistent violations of some of the finest principles it had so painstakingly developed during the last fifty years. These relate to respect for international rule of law, protection of human rights and upholding of peace with justice. It is no secret that prisoners detained in Iraq by the coalition forces are inhumanely treated, and it is estimated that about one-fourth of them are innocent. The ill-treatment of these prisoners, in many situations, has angered the civilian population and has turned them against the coalition forces.

The US military strategy to stabilize Iraq is not succeeding despite the deployment of extra troops. Bombing attacks by insurgents continue with dreadful regularity. With ethnic and sectarian tensions and conflict on the rise, the country stands on the brink of a civil war. According to the 2006 study by the John Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health, since the US invasion, it is estimated that over 600,000 Iraqis have lost their lives as a direct or indirect result of violence by coalition forces or insurgents. This war was promoted to save lives. Instead it gives the impression that there is a conspiracy between the two sides to outdo each other in terms of their military actions, at the expense of the Iraqi people. Another report released in 2006 by the office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees places the total number of refugees displaced by the war at more than 1.6 million.

The polarization of Iraqi society, coupled with the weakness of the state and the security forces in general and the trend to take recourse to violence by all sides to resolve differences and disputes is driving the country towards an increase in communal and insurgent violence and political extremism. Unless the major communities – Sunnis, Shias and the Kurds – come together in the larger interest of their people and work out a federal system of governance that meets the aspirations of the three communities, Iraq is likely to end up in chaos, confusion and blood-letting even worse than what we witness at present. To avoid an anarchic fragmentation of the state, adjustments, concessions and, most of all, understanding and patience must be shown by all sides in order to arrive at an equitable and just formula of power-sharing.

The WCC executive committee that met in February 2003, just before the outbreak of hostilities, was aware of the pitfalls of the military intervention and called the war immoral, ill-advised and in breach of the principles of the United Nations Charter. It therefore warned:

"... that war in Iraq will cause humanitarian crisis of great magnitude with untold human suffering, specially for the children of Iraq, loss of life, property, environmental destruction and waste of precious resources; it will reinforce and polarize division and hatred between communities resulting in further destabilization in the region".

Four years down the road, the above has come true and yet the sponsors of this tragic war insist on carrying on military pursuits that, no doubt, will result in further carnage and destruction. Iraq is a broken and fractured society that badly needs healing and reconciliation. We hear the cries of the Iraqi people, the women, the children and the innocent civilians who are in pain and agony and despair. It is our Christian responsibility to respond to their cries.

The ecumenical political ethic calls for power to be exercised with utmost respect for human dignity and for the sanctity of life. The situation of Iraq demands that the churches continue not only to assist and support the victims of this disastrous war, but also to speak on their behalf and to redouble intervention for peace with governments and with intergovernmental bodies.

We are encouraged by the upsurge of anti-war sentiments all over the world, particularly in the United States. The churches in the United States, in the midst of suffering and death in Iraq, are called to witness to Jesus Christ, the life of the world. God's gift of life is sacred. It is entrusted to us for care and nurture. This precious gift merits enduring respect for the international rule of law and the upholding of human dignity.

At this time, I call on WCC member churches to pray and intercede on behalf of the people of Iraq, before God, that the war forced upon them may come to an end and that peace with justice and dignity may prevail for all the people of Iraq.

- **Statement on Iraq and its Christian communities by the WCC executive committee, Etchmiadzin, Armenia, 25-28 September 2007**

The basic well-being and human rights of substantial portions of Iraqi society are heavily degraded after decades of wars and chaos, and remain under grave threat. Yet the suffering of the Iraqi people remains largely unrecognized and unresolved. The executive committee of the World Council of Churches, meeting in Etchmiadzin, Armenia, 25-28 September, 2007, is deeply troubled by their suffering and calls urgently for solutions. Amid the many suffering communities there, we note that the fate of Iraq's Christian communities gives churches around the world particular cause for concern and reason to respond.

Churches of the WCC have raised many warnings and sought to provide hope to the people of Iraq. We recall *inter alia*:

The central committee urging sustained diplomacy instead of war (Geneva, 2002); that the current war is immoral, ill-advised and in breach of the United Nations Charter, that the UN Security Council withdraw the open-ended mandate it had given to the occupation of Iraq, for a collective international commitment to support the people of Iraq including reparations by the occupying powers for damages caused by the unlawful use of force (Geneva, 2003); and that the US-led military presence be reduced and terminated, the US adhere to international law on the treatment of prisoners and churches overseas advocate for and assist Christians to stay in Iraq (Geneva, 2005);

The executive committee judging the sanctions imposed on Iraq to have failed to meet the necessary criteria while causing serious violations of human rights (Geneva, 1998); and that the impending war “will cause a humanitarian crisis of grave magnitude with untold suffering...loss of life, property, environmental damage and waste of precious resources” and “polarise division and hatred between communities resulting in further destabilization of the regions” (Bossey, February 2003).

The Iraqi people

Today one-third of the Iraqi population is in need of humanitarian assistance. More than half of Iraqis live in abject poverty or worse (54 percent), according to a recent Iraqi government survey. One Iraqi in six is internally uprooted or among the two million people who have fled the country. All of these groups experience severe and chronic deficits in food security, in access to clean water, sanitation, health services and education, and in possibilities to earn a livelihood.

Poverty, deprivation and human insecurity are extremely high in Iraq. Effective allocations of national and international resources to remedy these ills are very low. Exploitation of the country's vast petroleum resources provides little overall benefit to the Iraqi people. Nevertheless, massive expenditures for military and security programmes continue with no end in sight to the conflict and insecurity at which they are directed.

Iraq's dire humanitarian situation developed during the latter years of Saddam Hussein's regime and the sanctions imposed on Iraq. Its national traumas include dictatorship, the Iran-Iraq war, and the first Gulf War. Since the current US-led invasion, public health surveys indicate that conflict has caused hundreds of thousands more deaths and driven more than four million people from their communities.

The prevalence of violence by non-state armed groups, regular armed forces and criminal groups affects people in most parts of Iraq, causing heavy casualties, fear, deprivation and emigration.

Based on experiences with the chronic insecurity that has set in since the invasion of 2003, national and international NGOs including church organizations have limited but still significant opportunities to deliver effective humanitarian assistance under current circumstances.

However, international recognition and action on the humanitarian crisis in Iraq is lacking. Internationally, a climate of silence about their fate prevails instead. The silence is punctuated by daily reports of casualty figures but appears to be sustained by the reluctance of governments to engage in the difficult international political task of working out solutions to the Iraq crisis.

Iraq's Christian communities

Although Christians represent only four percent of Iraq's population, they make up 40 percent of its refugees. Their fate speaks twice, informing overseas churches about both the general humanitarian needs in Iraq and the urgency of saving Iraq's Christian communities.

On the one hand, the current Christian exodus is but one of many warnings that radically new approaches to Iraq's crisis are needed. Strategies based on the use of force have driven the country into chaos. To continue them has the effect of adding new fuel to a raging fire. The flight of Christians from Iraq is a sign of the failure of policies that were purported to bring stability and peace to Iraq and even the region.

Traumas that affect Christian communities – violent attacks, incessant fear, frequent kidnappings, social upheaval, economic collapse and attacks on houses of worship – also affect Iraqi society at large. Members of all religious communities in Iraq are now displaced or have fled the country. The fate of Christians must not be seen in isolation from the fate of Muslims, or of other minorities such as the Yazidees and Mandeans, or used to worsen relations with Muslims or other groups.

Iraq's leaders and the foreign governments involved must find ways to install the rule of law. Intolerance between social groups has grown markedly as an outcome of the conflict there. The rule of law must include re-establishment of a multi-cultural equilibrium in society.

On the other hand, a living Christian presence is a positive reminder that peace, pluralism and tolerance are things that work together for good, in Iraq and throughout the Middle East. The continuing presence of Christians in Iraq is a witness to the ethnic, cultural and religious diversity that are an essential part of the Middle East.

Like other Christians of the region, Iraqi Christians affirm that the future of Christianity does not lie in emigration but in peace. Their churches are some of the oldest in the world, but foundations laid in biblical times are being torn up in our day. As they strive to meet the present challenges and show great strength, they also look to churches overseas and especially in the West to do more to influence governments to find even-handed solutions for Iraq and for other crises in the region.

Credit is due to the leading Muslim clerics who are using their authority to contain the violence in Iraq despite the presence of factional, foreign and criminal armed forces. These leaders understand and acknowledge the fate of the churches. Multi-religious initiatives to resolve conflicts there and promote reconciliation also give cause for hope.

Joint Christian-Muslim advocacy overseas for tolerance and co-existence in Iraq would send a powerful signal to Iraqis of all faiths. It would also be an investment in the best interests of an increasingly polarized region.

Recommendations:

Whereas dangers and deprivations confronting the Iraqi people give cause for great concern, those suffering are not beyond the reach of God's plenteous mercy. Members of the body of Christ are called to reach out in similar spirit with acts of compassion, demonstrations of solidarity and embassies of peace. Accordingly, the executive committee of the World Council of Churches, meeting in Etchmiadzin, Armenia, 25-28 September 2007, calls the member churches of the WCC to take *direct actions*:

A. Keeping the people and churches of Iraq in their prayers and providing increased assistance to them for church life and for service to a society in great need. Support can be channelled through ACT International, the Middle East Council of Churches, WCC-related specialized ministries and church families present in Iraq.

B. Raising awareness in their parishes and in their countries concerning the general suffering of the Iraqi people including its Christian communities.

C. Providing support to displaced people inside Iraq and to Iraqi refugees through ACT International, the Middle East Council of Churches and WCC-related specialized ministries.

D. Demonstrating their solidarity with the Christian communities and people of Iraq. Church-only actions and joint initiatives with Muslims are both needed in order to show support for the people of Iraq and to make clear once again that policies of occupation do not have international church support.

Whereas the core problems of the Iraq crisis remain largely unresolved, namely, the failures to meet basic needs, ensure public security and provide essential infrastructure; the low levels of multilateral support for government institutions and civil society groups; the on-going presence of occupation forces; no balanced sharing of national resources; increased alienation between communities and loss of religious freedom; therefore the executive committee calls WCC member churches *to advocate with governments*:

E. Contacting the governments whose forces occupy Iraq to remind them of their obligations to the people of Iraq under the Geneva Conventions and, at the same time, to remind these governments of the unconscionable losses of human life from more than four years of war in Iraq, condemning all causes of civilian casualties – from the as many as one million ‘excess deaths’ now documented by public health surveys, to the ‘collateral damage’ caused by military action, to the countless suicide attacks.

F. Engaging their own governments over the need to break the international silence on the humanitarian crisis in Iraq and provide greater assistance to displaced and refugee

Iraqis through organizations such as the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and the International Organization for Migration.

G. Informing their governments of the fate of Iraq's Christian communities and the importance of protecting all minorities there to preserve the pluralistic, multi-faith character of Iraqi society.

H. Raising with their governments the importance of having open debate and broad multilateral engagement in the implementation of UN Security Council Resolution 1770 and of agreeing further measures that assist the people of Iraq in building a viable, independent state.

- **Open statement from CCIA director joining with all Christians in Iraq and around the world in grieving the death of the Archbishop Paulos Faraj Rahho of Mosul, 13 March 2008**

The World Council of Churches is deeply saddened by the news of the death of Archbishop Paulos Faraj Rahho of Mosul. The Council joins with all Christians in Iraq and around the world in grief. The death of Archbishop Paulos under the current circumstances of war and violence in Iraq is distressful for all who believe in peace and reconciliation. While the cause of his death remains unknown, his recent kidnapping reflects the continuing deterioration of the situation in Mosul and the ongoing struggle of the Iraqi people. The World Council of Churches calls on its members in the Middle East as well as in the other regions of the world to remember Archbishop Paulos and his family in their prayers and conveys its condolences to the family of the bereaved. When one part of the body of Christ is wounded, then all parts of Christ's body suffer as a result of it. We ask for all to pray for the people of Iraq, for the war to end and in particular for the Iraqi Christian community which has suffered deeply in the past few years.

Rev. Elenora Giddings-Ivory
Programme director
Public Witness and Global Advocacy

- **Letter from WCC general secretary to H.E. Mr Nuri al-Maliki, prime minister of Iraq expressing support in opposing the victimization of Iraqi citizens based on their faith or ethnicity, 14 October 2008**

Your Excellency,

Greetings in the name of almighty God.

I write on behalf of the World Council of Churches (WCC) to express support for the government and people of Iraq in opposing the victimization of Iraqi citizens based on their faith or ethnicity. We join you in calling all Iraqis – Christians, Moslems and Iraqis of every faith community – to show solidarity with one another for the common good.

It is with particular concern that the World Council of Churches (WCC) received the news of the brutal wave of violent attacks on Christians in Iraq in general, and especially in Mosul and Baghdad. While we condemn all violence against people of any faith or ethnicity, we are alarmed by recent attacks on the Iraqi Christian community because we believe this represents a threat to their very existence. The WCC is appalled by targeted killings of innocent civilians and by the forced displacement of the indigenous Iraqi Christian population that has been a major component of Iraqi culture for two thousand years.

On behalf of the worldwide Christian community I write to express our deepest outrage and condemnation over the killing of some 14 Christians in Mosul and the displacement of 1,500 Christian families. We urge you swiftly to bring to justice the perpetrators of these crimes. If this matter is not urgently and effectively addressed, such behaviour may spread to other parts of the country.

In this, we echo the voice of the churches' leaders in Iraq, affirming the historical fact that Iraqi Christians are an integral component of Iraq's national ethnic and religious groupings. Unfortunately, to many of us it seems that some people are taking out their anger at the coalition forces on the local Christian community. As you well know, the Christians of Iraq have lived in the region for two millennia and have no connection to those countries that have caused this war. I urge you to make these facts crystal clear to all Iraqis in your public statements, speeches and pronouncements.

As the World Council of Churches appreciates the efforts made by Your Excellency in ordering police brigades to protect the Christian areas in Mosul, we call on the Iraqi government to carry out its responsibility in protecting all its citizens. We also call on the multi-national forces in Iraq to defend rights guaranteed to all communities by the Fourth Geneva Convention.

For the past five years as your country has suffered a grievous war, ecumenical Christians have stood in solidarity with you in prayer and action. Our churches in Europe, the United States and other countries that formed the coalition forces tried hard to encourage an alternative to war. When war came, they continued to work hard to bring it to a quick and reasonable conclusion. The pain of your people has been ours as well.

I urge you, Mr Prime Minister, to do all in your power to provide the humanitarian assistance that is necessary to those Christians who are displaced from their homes and villages. We ourselves stand ready to help.

Finally, I want to let you know that the World Council of Churches is organizing a visit by church representatives from many countries to show our solidarity with the people of

Iraq. This visit will include meetings in Baghdad and Mosul with leaders and members of diverse communities, including Christians. We hope that it may be possible for us to meet with you in order to learn more of the challenges and opportunities facing your nation.

Yours sincerely,
Rev. Dr Samuel Kobia
General secretary

- **Letter from WCC general secretary to Rev. Dr Michael Kinnamon, general secretary of the NCCCUSA, informing member churches in the US of appeals the WCC had made to leaders of the UN and the government of Iraq, seeking a swift end to the persecution of Christians and other minorities in Iraq, 14 October 2008**

Dear Michael,

As you know, this week there have been targeted killings of Christians in Mosul, Iraq. Since September 28th, some 14 Christians have been killed, three houses were bombed and 1,500 families have been displaced. Reports from churches in the region suggest that these acts may be part of a systematic campaign to drive Christians from the country. Since the U.S.-led invasion in 2003, more than 200 Christians have been killed, dozens of churches bombed and more than half the Christian population has left Iraq.

I want you and your member churches in the USA to be aware of appeals that the World Council of Churches is making to leaders of the United Nations and the government of Iraq as we seek a swift end to the persecution of Christians and other minorities in Iraq. These letters, as well as an open letter to the Iraqi churches, are posted on the WCC website, www.oikoumene.org.

In addition, the World Council of Churches is organizing an official visit of ecumenical representatives to Mosul and Baghdad, in the tradition of “Living Letters” demonstrations of solidarity. I very much hope that one or more delegates from the NCCCUSA will be able to join us in this journey. Members of our staff will be in touch with you soon to discuss the details.

The World Council of Churches deeply appreciates the firm and courageous stance taken by the US churches to protest the war in Iraq, from its inception until now. I trust that the NCCCUSA is using its good offices to protest the failure of coalition forces in Iraq to fulfill their responsibility under the Fourth Geneva Convention to maintain the safety and security of Iraqi civilians, and particularly the rights of Christian citizens during the occupation of their country.

We in the WCC have felt called to witness for peace and the defense of the rights of our brothers and sisters in Iraq. It is a tragedy that the violence of recent years now threatens the very survival of a 2000-year-old Christian community. We are grateful to all who join us in this witness.

Michael, please know how much we in the WCC appreciate your work and that of the NCCCUSA as a whole during these difficult days. Keep us in your prayers, as you are in ours.

In Christian solidarity,
Rev. Dr Samuel Kobia
General secretary

- **Letter to H.E. Mr Ban Ki-moon, UN general secretary, regarding targeted attacks on the Christian community of Mosul, 14 October 2008**

Your Excellency,

The World Council of Churches is deeply concerned about the recent targeted attacks on the Christian community of Mosul in Iraq.

Since September 28, 2008, fourteen Christians have been killed, three houses destroyed and 1,500 families were forced to flee their homes in fear of their lives.

We greatly appreciate the strong words of the UN special representative, Steffan de Mistura, in condemning this violence and denouncing the killing of civilians. The UN through Mr de Mistura rightly stressed the legal and political rights of the Christian community and their important place in Iraqi society as one of the oldest indigenous religious communities. In addition, we are particularly grateful for the emergency aid provided to over 500 families.

While valuing the UN's pledge to continue to monitor the situation, we believe even more is required. We urge the Security Council and the secretary general to do all in their power to ensure that the coalition forming the Multinational Force assumes their responsibility under the Fourth Geneva Convention to provide for the safety and well-being of all civilians living under the current state of military occupation in Iraq. We also call on the Iraqi government to assume its responsibility to investigate and bring to justice those responsible for these targeted attacks against civilians.

These attacks, and the resultant death and displacement, represent one small part of an overall pattern that is forcing the Christian community to leave their homeland. The international community has a responsibility boldly to address this existential threat to the viability of this ancient indigenous community in Iraq.

We stand ready to collaborate to the fullest in responding to the emergency needs of the Christian community while recognizing that the real solution lies in the end of the occupation and the installation of the rule of law. In the meantime, the international community must ensure the safety and security of all Iraqi civilians, and among them the Christian community of Mosul.

Yours sincerely,
Rev. Dr Samuel Kobia
General secretary

- **Open letter from WCC general secretary to the churches in Iraq expressing the condolences and solidarity of Christians world-wide in reaction to the violence against Christians perpetrated in Mosul, 14 October 2008**

Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

It is with anguish and great concern that we have followed the news concerning terrible acts of violence in Mosul during the past week. We have heard that people are being killed, houses bombed, thousands are fleeing their homes, and churches and church properties are being destroyed. You are constantly on our minds, and in our prayers.

The fellowship of the World Council of Churches is deeply troubled by your suffering and calls urgently for solutions. We have been in contact with officials of the United Nations and the Iraqi government, as well with our member churches and ecumenical partners throughout the world, lobbying for swift action to quell the violence in Iraq and to thwart activities aimed at the expulsion of Christians and other minority populations.

We are also organizing a visit to Mosul and Baghdad by representative members of the ecumenical movement, to demonstrate our solidarity with those who are under threat.

We in the World Council of Churches are urging all our member churches and partners to pray for peace and reconciliation in Iraq, to pray for the families of those who have lost their dear ones, for those who are displaced, for all others who suffer the consequences of violence and for all who are striving to restore trust and goodwill among people and communities.

On behalf of the member churches and partners of the World Council of Churches, I am writing to express our support as you pass through these turbulent and challenging times, and to encourage you to witness to the love and peace of God in Jesus Christ even amidst hatred and aggression. I also write in order to convey our heartfelt condolences and deepest sympathy and solidarity to the grieving families of the victims and all who are affected by this calamity. Even as we suffer, the apostle advised, we have the

opportunity to overcome evil with good (Rom.12:21). Let us pray for harmony among religious communities, and let us work together to build trust and mutual respect.

Knowing that your situation is extremely difficult in this moment, we encourage you – in so far as it is possible – to remain in your land and to bear witness there. You are “living stones” in the Middle East, the region where the foundations of the Church were laid and from which the gospel was carried to the ends of the earth. Your presence in the land is an assurance that Christianity continues to endure; you are a sign of hope to people of faith everywhere.

May the God of peace fill our hearts and minds with the love of Christ, through the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, so that we may strive in unity to establish God’s reign of peace, justice and life for all.

Yours in Christ,
Rev. Dr Samuel Kobia
General secretary

- **Final statement from the meeting of representatives of the churches in Iraq, Dar Sayedat al-Jabal, Lebanon, 9-11 February 2009**

In a meeting organized by the World Council of Churches in Dar Sayedit Al Jabal, Fatka, Lebanon, between 10 and 11 February 2009, 12 church leaders from all over Iraq discussed the current situation of its Christians community. Representatives from different Iraqi churches participated in the meeting together with bishops from the Syrian and Armenian Orthodox Churches and the Chaldean Church in Lebanon, and the general secretary of the Middle East Council of Churches.

They discussed the current situation of Christians in Iraq, focusing on the following three main themes:

1. Addressing the common challenges facing Iraqis, particularly Christians today, above all the issue of safety and security as well as forced migration. And defining their expectations from the act of solidarity and advocacy by the ecumenical family.
2. Strengthening the Christian presence in Iraq and affirming its role in bearing witness to the faith. Highlighting the role of Iraqi Christians in building educational and social institutions that contribute to national reconciliation, peace building and stability based on respect of diversity and co-citizenship within Iraq.
3. Revitalizing Christian-Muslim dialogue in order to promote constructive and peaceful coexistence.

Participants agreed on the following points:

- Christians have belonged to Iraq since the nation's birth; they are not merely a minority but an essential part of Iraqi society and deeply rooted in its history and civilization. As authentic children of this land, they have the right to live freely in it and enjoy equal rights and responsibilities along with all other citizens.
- The participants called upon Iraqi Christians to stay in their homeland and participate actively in its rebuilding and its development.
- They also called on the churches in the West not to encourage migration and resettlement programs for refugees outside Iraq, rather to focus their efforts on bringing back security and stability inside Iraq for all Iraqis to live in it. The solution to current conditions lies not in emptying Iraq of its human resources, but in providing a peaceful and safe environment, infrastructures, job opportunities, and in protecting all citizens. The goal is to enable Iraqis to work together, healing wounds and building a better future for themselves.
- It is essential that dialogue continue among Christians and their Muslim brothers and sisters in order to promote a constructive and peaceful co-existence based on mutual respect and good citizenship.
- Participants pledged to work together on establishing an ecumenical forum that allows all Iraqi church leaders to speak in a common voice with a unified message.

At the closing of the consultation, participants expressed their gratitude to the World Council of Churches for organizing this meeting and to the Middle East Council of Churches for their presence. They also thanked all the churches who expressed solidarity and provided support to the Iraqi people in their sufferings.

• **Letter from WCC general secretary to the churches in Iraq expressing condolences and sympathy over the loss of life following the wave of attacks on churches and communities in Baghdad, Mosul and Kerkuk, 14 July 2009**

Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

We have been deeply troubled and saddened by the brutal wave of violent attacks on the churches and Christian communities in Baghdad, Mosul and Kerkuk over this last week, which have left four people dead and 32 others injured.

On behalf of the World Council of Churches I am writing to express our deepest concern over the loss of life and the constant threats you have suffered over the past six years. At the same time, I am writing to assure you of our support as you pass through these turbulent and challenging times, and to encourage you to continue to witness to the love and peace of God in Jesus Christ even amidst hatred and aggression.

It is with this spirit that we are organizing a visit to the churches in Baghdad, Mosul and the North of Iraq by representative members of the WCC fellowship of churches, to demonstrate our solidarity and support, to share your concerns and hopes, and to work with you for peaceful solutions.

On behalf of the ecumenical family, we express our sincere condolences and sympathy to the people of Iraq, especially to the families of those who were killed and injured. We pray for peace and reconciliation in Iraq, and for those who are displaced, for all others who suffer the consequences of violence and for all who are striving to restore trust and goodwill among people and communities.

You are constantly in our thoughts and prayers as you pass through this tragic and critical time.

Yours in Christ,
Rev. Dr Samuel Kobia
General secretary

- **Letter from WCC general secretary to the ambassador of the Permanent Mission of Iraq to the UN in Geneva, expressing condolences to victims of terrorist attacks against the Iraqi Foreign ministry, Finance Ministry and other public targets in Baghdad, 25 August 2009**

Your Excellency,

It is with great sadness that we received the news of the terrorist attack against the headquarters of the Foreign Affairs Ministry, Ministry of Finance and other public places in Baghdad on 19 August 2009 leaving about a hundred people dead and six hundreds injured. On behalf of the World Council of Churches I extend heartfelt condolences to the families and friends of the victims. While we strongly condemn these cruel and inhuman actions, we pray God almighty to console all those bereaved who mourn the loss of their loved ones. May God grant them consolation where human words and efforts fail.

We are deeply distressed and appalled to see and read the daily accounts of violence and targeted killings of innocent civilians in different parts of Iraq, and we pray that this cycle of violence will come to an end very soon.

The World Council of Churches has always been in solidarity with all people of Iraq. The pain of your people has been ours as well, and our member churches everywhere continue to pray for peace and reconciliation in Iraq, to pray for the families of those who have lost their dear ones, for those who are displaced, for all others who suffer the consequences of violence and for all who are striving to restore trust and goodwill among people and communities.

Sincerely yours,
Rev. Dr Samuel Kobia
General secretary

- **Joint letter from WCC and CEC general secretaries to Ms Navanethem Pillay, UN high commissioner for Human Rights, conveying deepest concern for the well-being and security of members of the Iranian opposition People's Mojahedin Organization of Iran/PMOI in Camp Ashraf, Iraq, 18 September 2009**

Your Excellency,

Greetings from the World Council of Churches and the Conference of European Churches.

We are writing to you to convey our deepest concern for the well-being and security of 3400 members of the Iranian opposition People's Mojahedin Organization of Iran/PMOI in Camp Ashraf, Iraq.

We have been highly alarmed by the events of 28 and 29 July 2009, when Iraqi Security Forces attacked Camp Ashraf. This attack left 11 dead and several hundred wounded while 36 people were arbitrarily arrested and are still held in custody despite an Iraqi court order on 24 August for their release. Meanwhile the 36 detainees as well as residents of Camp Ashraf and their relatives in different parts of the world have been on a hunger strike for over 50 days now, something that poses a serious threat to their lives.

Furthermore, the presence of several hundred of women and children in Camp Ashraf makes all the more urgent the need for the adoption of effective measures for the prevention of a new humanitarian crisis. The residents of Camp Ashraf should not be involuntarily deported, expelled or repatriated in violation of the principle of *non-refoulement*, nor should they be forcibly displaced inside Iraq in violation of the relevant provisions of the Geneva Conventions and International Humanitarian law.

Your Excellency, appreciating your strong commitment and struggle for the protection and promotion of human rights and world peace, we would like to ask you to place an observatory team of the UN in Camp Ashraf and if possible to launch an international fact-finding mission, in order to avoid a new outburst of violence against the unarmed population of Camp Ashraf and prevent a possible humanitarian disaster.

Once again, we offer our appreciation and thanks for your leadership and timely intervention.

Yours sincerely,

Rev. Dr Samuel Kobia
General secretary
World Council of Churches

The Venerable Colin Williams
General secretary
Conference of European Churches

- **Joint letter from WCC and CEC general secretaries to Ms Ahlam Al-Gailani, chargé d'affaires of the Permanent Mission of Iraq to the United Nations, conveying deepest concern for the well-being and security of members of the Iranian opposition People's Mojahedin Organization of Iran/PMOI in Camp Ashraf, Iraq, 29 September 2009**

Your Excellency,

Greetings from the World Council of Churches and the Conference of European Churches.

We are writing to you to convey our deepest concern for the wellbeing and security of 3400 members of the Iranian opposition People's Mojahedin Organization of Iran/PMOI in Camp Ashraf, Iraq.

We have been highly alarmed by the events of 28 and 29 July 2009, when Iraqi Security Forces attacked Camp Ashraf. This attack left 11 dead and several hundred wounded while 36 people were arbitrarily arrested and are still held in custody despite an Iraqi court order on 24 August for their release. Meanwhile the 36 detainees as well as residents of Camp Ashraf and their relatives in different parts of the world have been on a hunger strike for over 50 days now, something that poses a serious threat to their lives.

Furthermore, the presence of several hundred of women and children in Camp Ashraf makes all the more urgent the need for the adoption of effective measures for the prevention of a new humanitarian crisis. The residents of Camp Ashraf should not be involuntarily deported, expelled or repatriated in violation of the principle of *non-refoulement*, nor should they be forcibly displaced inside Iraq in violation of the relevant provisions of the Geneva Conventions and International Humanitarian law.

Your Excellency, having shared our concern with the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights on the current situation, we think that an observatory team of the UN should be deployed in Camp Ashraf and if possible an international fact-finding mission should also be launched, in order to avoid a new outburst of violence against the unarmed population of Camp Ashraf and prevent a possible humanitarian disaster.

We would highly appreciate all efforts and support your government could offer to measures aiming at protecting the lives of innocent civilians.

Yours sincerely,

Rev. Dr Samuel Kobia
General secretary
World Council of Churches

The Venerable Colin Williams
General secretary
Conference of European Churches

- **Letter from WCC general secretary to H.E. Mr Nuri al-Maliki, prime minister of the Republic of Iraq, regarding the recent series of bombings in central Bagdad, 14 December 2009**

Your Excellency,

We have been deeply shocked and saddened by the news of a series of bombings last week in central Bagdad which has killed more than 120 people and wounded 448 others. The World Council of Churches strongly condemns such wanton acts of terrorism and violence targeting innocent human lives. By expressing our strong condemnation of this act of violence, we offer our prayers and express our sincere condolences and sympathy to the bereaved families and wish speedy recovery for the injured.

Excellency, our acute disquiet stems from keen anticipation around the world in regard to upcoming elections which, it is hoped, will bolster the process of self-government in the country and pave the way for a climate of lasting peace and development in Iraq. At this time, we also express our support to the Iraqi government under your able leadership, and pray that your efforts to create a democratic climate will not suffer a setback. Please be assured of our prayerful support confident that you will transcend the situation so that the planned elections may proceed securely and unimpeded. We believe, it is urgent that the Iraqi people install their own elected, inclusive and sovereign government to run the affairs of your beloved country.

The World Council of Churches will continue to work with and through its member churches in Iraq and globally in support of all efforts to bring peace and reconciliation in Iraq so that your people may realize their longing for healing after years of war and violence.

Yours in the name of peace,
Rev. Dr Samuel Kobia
General secretary

Israel-Palestine

- **Sixty Years of WCC Policy on Palestine/Israel, 1948-2008 (in brief), April 2007**

Negotiating a just peace under the rule of law is the strongest option for ensuring the well-being and security of both the Israeli and Palestinian peoples. This is the core of World Council of Churches policy toward the conflict. It is a conviction that has grown as 40 years of illegal occupation of Palestinian territory has claimed lives, distorted the rights of both peoples and deepened the conflict between them. In making policy the WCC is attentive to those who are suffering, recognizes UN resolutions as the basis for peace and is watchful that the Geneva Conventions determine the occupying power's responsibilities in the meantime. Policy is set by the WCC Assembly, central committee and executive committee. Main positions follow, in brief.

- **Palestinians have the right of self-determination;** their duly elected governmental authorities must be recognized, including the current leaders; their refugees have the right of return and require a permanent solution.
- **Israel and its legitimate security needs are recognized** beginning with the state's emergence in 1948, in UN guarantees for its existence, in the right to protect its people under international law, and in guarantees for the territorial integrity of all nations in the area including Israel.
- **The life and witness of local churches guide churches worldwide** in prayer, support and advocacy for peace. Churches are to agree the status of Holy Places with Muslim and Jewish counterparts. Local authorities must not interfere in internal church affairs.
- **Jerusalem must be an open, inclusive and shared city** in terms of sovereignty and citizenship. The rights of its communities are guaranteed—Muslim, Jewish and Christian, Palestinian and Israeli – including access to Holy Places and freedom of worship. The WCC opposes the annexation of East Jerusalem. The final status of Jerusalem is an international responsibility and must be agreed within the framework of international law and as part of a comprehensive Israeli-Palestinian peace settlement.
- **Settlements are illegal, as is their expansion;** they are prohibited by the Fourth Geneva Convention and incompatible with peace. Israeli soldiers and settlers must be withdrawn.
- **The Separation Barrier is illegal.** It is a grave breach of international law and humanitarian law, and must be removed from occupied territory.
- **The WCC supports a two-state solution** where Israelis and Palestinians live side by side within secure, recognized borders and share Jerusalem, as called for in UN resolutions.
- **The WCC supports groups on both sides working for peace** and reconciliation, including interreligious initiatives.
- **Violence in all its forms is condemned,** whether perpetrated by the State of Israel inside the Occupied Palestinian Territories or by Palestinian armed groups

inside the State of Israel. The conflict cannot be resolved through the use of force but only through peaceful means.

- **Certain economic measures are legitimate forms of pressure for peace.** The WCC encourages member churches to avoid investments or other economic links to illegal activities on occupied territory, and to boycott settlement products.
- **Peace in Israel and Palestine is inseparable from international peace.** The conflict affects stability and security in the Middle East and in other regions.

- **Letter to the Prime Minister of Jordan, Dr Marouf Suleiman al-Bakhit regarding the withdrawal of recognition of His Beatitude Theophilos III, Patriarch of the Holy City of Jerusalem and All Palestine, 18 May 2007**

Your Excellency,

Greetings in the name of almighty God.

It is with deep concern that the World Council of Churches (WCC) received the news that your honourable government decided to withdraw its recognition from the legally elected His Beatitude Theophilos III, patriarch of the Holy City of Jerusalem and All Palestine. We want to express our fear that such a decision might lead to a division among the Orthodox Christian community in Jordan and Palestine with negative ecclesial and socio-political consequences.

We understand the reason behind this decision by the Jordanian government, and interpret it in terms of strengthening the Christian Arab presence and witness in Jordan and Palestine. In this sense we also welcome the recent decisions of the Holy Synod of the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate under the leadership of His Beatitude Theophilos III, to accelerate the process of satisfying the request formulated by the Arab faithful of the Patriarchate.

In a period where the WCC is convening an international peace conference in Amman (17-21 June) calling the churches worldwide to coordinate their actions towards ending the Israeli occupation of Palestinian territories, and working for a just peace and reconciliation in the Middle East, this decision might prove counter-productive for all peace initiatives and distract from the goals of this conference.

Although fully aware that your government's decision does not interfere in the internal affairs of the Orthodox Church of Jerusalem in terms of judging the legality of His Beatitude's election by the Holy Synod of that church, we still believe that recognizing His Beatitude as the Patriarch of the Holy City of Jerusalem and All Palestine is of utmost importance for the good governance of the institutions related to that Patriarchate.

We therefore, very respectfully and kindly ask your honourable government to reconsider its decision so that peace and harmony within the church prevail again. Thanking you in advance for the positive attention that you will give to this special request, we look forward to have a fruitful consultation in Amman next June.

Rev. Dr Samuel Kobia
General secretary

- **Letter to the heads of churches and Christian communities in Jerusalem regarding prayers, seminars and advocacy events being organized on Sunday, 3 June 2007, 1 June 2007**

Your Beatitudes,
Your Eminences and Graces,
Dear Reverend Fathers,

Grace and peace to you in the Name of our Lord Jesus Christ, the One who is called the Prince of Peace.

It is with special prayers for peace and with heartfelt thoughts of gratitude that we, at the World Council of Churches, write today. We would like to convey our thanks to you for the leadership and inspiration you are providing in the coming days for Christians and churches around the world. I am referring to your unique and common contribution to the worldwide engagement of churches for peace, June 3-9, 2007, during the initiative convened by the WCC, "International Church Action for Peace in Palestine and Israel" (ICAPPI).

On Sunday, June 3, the prayers, readings and songs to be used in the ecumenical celebration in Jerusalem will also be used around the world. It is fitting that this may well be the broadest form of participation in the week. Numerous parishes, including here in Geneva, see the service in St. Stephen's Church, Jerusalem, as a special opportunity to pray with you at the same time or on the same day.

Your service and message for the week are the anchor of the initiative, in spirit and in fact. The material has been shared with churches in over 100 countries and our staff refers to it in interviews with media. Using the WCC website the service is also linked to a news story that has gone out to thousands of opinion leaders in the churches and beyond. We very much appreciate the participation in the worldwide ICAPPI planning by the Jerusalem Inter-church Center (JIC), which has helped to make this possible.

From Sunday onward, churches are organizing prayers, seminars and advocacy events. In response to the call for a united witness, they are each in their own way working to raise awareness in churches, in society and with their governments concerning the

urgency of new efforts to end the occupation and to work for peace with justice. They stand with the Christian communities in Jerusalem and the rest of the occupied territories, and with all who suffer from this occupation.

In the US, church groups are joining peaceful demonstrations in Chicago, New York and Washington. In Brussels and other European capitals, Pax Christi members are part of joint Roman Catholic delegations to the European Union and member governments. In South Africa, the foreign minister is scheduled to speak at a service in the cathedral in Cape Town and the national broadcaster has been asked to hold talk shows with some of the returned Ecumenical Accompaniers that you have met. In Sydney, an inter-faith prayer service will be followed by the planting of an olive tree with the local Palestinian community. And in Jerusalem, the invitation from the YMCA/YWCA for people to sponsor olive trees--one for each of the 14,607 days of occupation--is being shared as part of the week.

Some churches have told us this is the first time they are taking up the issue of the occupation between churches or in public. Even after 40 years churches are still learning more about the unmet hopes of those who live under occupation.

May our Lord bless you and your churches in these days and for the days ahead. To write to you at this time is also an opportunity to assure you again of the expectations with which we are preparing for the conference in Jordan later this month, "Churches together for peace and justice in the Middle East". My anticipation and interest in that event are only heightened by the prospect of the long-awaited visit with you in Jerusalem that will follow the conference.

Yours in Christ,
Rev. Dr Samuel Kobia
General secretary

- **The Amman Call: WCC International Peace Conference, “Churches together for Peace and Justice in the Middle East”, Amman, Jordan, 18-20 June 2007**

Amman imperatives

Almost sixty years have passed since the Christian churches first spoke with one voice about Arab-Israeli peace. For the last forty years the Christian churches have called for an end to the Israeli occupation of Palestine. In the very place where Jesus Christ walked upon the earth, walls now separate families and the children of God – Christian, Muslim and Jew – are imprisoned in a deepening cycle of violence, humiliation and despair. The Palestinian Christians from Gaza to Jerusalem and to Nazareth have called out to their brothers and sisters in Christ with this urgent plea: “Enough is enough. No more words without deeds. It is time for action.”

We welcome the timely and prophetic statement of the heads of churches in Jerusalem. We affirm that “the Churches are part of the conflict, because the churches cannot remain silent while there is still suffering. The role of the churches is to heal and to bring all sides to reconciliation.” Our belief in God reminds us “that all God's children of all religions and political parties are to be respected.” We assure the churches of Palestine and Israel of our prayers, collaboration and resources.

Thus, in Amman, Jordan 18-20 June 2007, days that have witnessed a deepening of the crisis in the occupied Palestinian territories, and also includes the United Nations World Refugee Day, we representatives of Christian churches and church-related organizations from every corner of the earth, affirm the decision of the central committee of the World Council of Churches and launch the “Palestine Israel Ecumenical Forum” as an instrument to *“catalyze and co-ordinate new and existing church advocacy for peace, aimed at ending the illegal occupation in accordance with UN resolutions, and demonstrate its commitment to interreligious action for peace and justice that serves all the peoples of the region.”*

This action has been taken in response to three fundamental imperatives that call us to action:

- The ethical and theological imperative for a Just Peace
- The ecumenical imperative for unity in action
- The Gospel imperative for costly solidarity

The premises of this action are the following:

- That UN resolutions are the basis for peace and the Geneva conventions are applicable to the rights and responsibilities of the affected people.
- That Palestinians have the right of self-determination and the right of return.
- That a two-state solution must be viable politically, geographically economically and socially.
- That Jerusalem must be an open, accessible, inclusive and shared city for the two peoples and three religions.
- That both Palestine and Israel have legitimate security needs.
- That the Israeli settlements in the occupied Palestinian territories are illegal, and constitute an obstacle to peace.
- That the “Separation Barrier” constructed by Israel in the occupied Palestinian territories is a grave breach of international law and must be removed from the occupied territory.
- That there is no military solution for this conflict. Violence in all its forms cannot be justified whether perpetrated by Israelis or Palestinians.
- That comprehensive regional peace is indivisible from a just peace in Israel and Palestine.

- That the life and witness of local churches is at the center of worldwide church advocacy for a just peace.

We understand the mandate of the Palestine Israel Ecumenical Forum (PIEF) to be a space where we will develop comprehensive strategic approaches to the two processes of peace making and peace building. An inclusive core group convened urgently by the WCC should be mandated to facilitate this and also ensure improved coordination between all actors. The core group will be informed by the reports of the working groups of the Amman conference, and that its composition and mechanism be designed and announced by the WCC.

Peace building will include the following:

- Furthering theological and biblical perspectives and Christian education resources around those issues central to the conflict.
- Developing strategies that will support the processes of justice and reconciliation, including interreligious dialogue and cooperation.
- Strengthening the churches' responses to the occupation.
- Recognizing, encouraging and cooperating with all efforts of Israeli and Palestinian civil society that are in accord with the vision and goals of the PIEF.

Peace making will include the following:

- Defining and promoting measures, including economic ones, that could help end the occupation and enhance sustainable growth and development.
- Strengthening existing efforts and identifying new models of church solidarity in action. Supporting local churches and church related organizations not only to survive and continue their powerful ministries, including educational, health, cultural and social services, but also to thrive and be witnesses of hope.
- Developing a long-term advocacy strategy in order to mobilize all of our constituencies and influence change.

Amman challenges

We have heard the voices of the Christian churches of Palestine and Israel challenging and saying to us:

Act with us to liberate all peoples of this land from the logic of hatred, mutual rejection and death, so that they see in the other the face and dignity of God.

Pray with us in our efforts to resist evil in all of its guises.

Raise your voices along with ours as we speak “truth to power” and name with courage the injustices we see and experience. The illegal occupation has stolen two generations of lives in this tortured place, and threatens the next with hopelessness and rage.

Risk the curses and abuse that will be aimed at you and stand in solidarity with us and with our Palestinian brothers and sisters of all faiths as we defiantly reject the possibility that occupation will continue.

Help us to tear down walls and build and rebuild bridges among all peoples in the region. Extremism on all sides produces chaos. It threatens to divide us and to destroy bridges among peoples that would lead to reconciliation and peace.

Add your hope to ours in the knowledge that evil and despair have been overcome through the death of our Lord on the Cross and through His Resurrection.

Insist with us that all dispossessed peoples, all refugees, have the right to return.

Partner with us as we seek peace and pursue it. Peace is possible. Christians and Muslims and Jews have, can and will understand one another and live together as neighbours.

And we representatives of Christian churches and church-related organizations from every corner of the earth, we respond:

Yes, we will. Together we will act and pray and speak and work and risk reputations and lives to build with you bridges for an enduring peace among the peoples of this tortured and beautiful place – Palestine and Israel – to end these decades of injustice, humiliation and insecurity, to end the decades of living as refugees and under occupation. We will work with you to seek peace and pursue it. We have allowed too much time to pass. Time has not served the cause of peace but has served the cause of extremism. This is our urgent cause that cannot wait.

- **Letter to H.E. Dr Condoleezza Rice, US secretary of state, H.E. Ehud Olmert, prime minister of Israel and H.E. Mahmoud Abbas, president of the Palestinian National Authority regarding the upcoming meeting related to Peace in the Middle East, 26 November 2007**

Your Excellencies,

Holding a major meeting related to peace in the Middle East is an event of potential importance. We would like to commend you for your efforts in this regard.

The meeting this week in Annapolis takes place in a period when the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is having increasingly negative impacts locally and globally. A new initiative that demonstrates its relevance to a just peace between the peoples of Israel and Occupied Palestinian Territories would be welcomed around the world.

As this initiative is set to begin we would like to suggest three criteria for success based on 60 years of international church advocacy for peace in this conflict.

Good faith negotiations are the first criterion. The crux of the problem – the final status issues – will not yield without sustained and robust good faith negotiations by all sides. Experience has shown that the tactic of avoiding, delaying or diluting final status issues has lost all utility and credibility in peace initiatives to address this conflict.

Second, negotiations must recognize and involve those parties with legitimate interests at stake in the solution to the conflict. From the earliest possible juncture, peace negotiations must include their representatives in a meaningful and appropriate manner. The participation in Annapolis, now confirmed, of some states in the Arab Peace Initiative is an essential opening in this direction. The process you launch this week must be genuinely multilateral in order to advance the cause of peace.

Third, scrupulous adherence to the international rule of law is essential. Any agreement or process that you entertain will be judged against United Nations Security Council Resolutions and the treaty obligations of the parties involved, international human rights law and international humanitarian law.

These legal standards are the foundations of peace, as the international community has affirmed again and again through the United Nations and through international organizations of civil society including the World Council of Churches. Similarly, the specific United Nations Security Council resolutions on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict are the architecture of peace. These include UNSCR 242, 338, 1397 and 1515, and UN General Assembly Resolution 194 on the question of Jerusalem and refugees.

Also, during negotiations, the negotiating parties' behaviour in Israel and the Occupied Territories must be governed by the same body of international law. Early action on ending the isolation of Gaza and the collective punishment of its 1.5 million residents, stopping attacks on civilians of either side, releasing prisoners denied due process on both sides, freezing all settlement growth of any kind, ceasing land expropriation, stopping work on the separation barrier, opening negotiations about the Occupied Golan Heights, and other well-known steps will empower the Annapolis process if implemented and will hobble and weaken it if not implemented. Such steps will also signal the level of good faith behind the Annapolis process – making reconciliation between the main Palestinian political groups, Fatah and Hamas, eminently more feasible.

We especially commend the US administration for using its convening power to bring parties to the meeting. We would submit that negotiations based on good faith, on multilateral participation and on the rule of law will require the US administration not only to convene, but also to ensure that the final agreement preserves the indivisibility of justice for Palestinians and Israelis.

It is critical to respond to the reality that negotiations with similar intentions in the past have been counter-productive, allowing the occupation to continue and intensify. Among

the causes were the repeated failures to address core issues and to see those issues through in good faith to an equitable resolution. To meet and fail in the same manner yet again is, we believe, deeply and dangerously irresponsible at this point in the history of the conflict.

It is our fervent hope that the lessons learned in past peace processes will give you courage and perseverance. We are praying that steps taken now will serve to bring a just peace closer for both the Israeli and the Palestinian people. As people of faith and as fellow human beings, we are concerned for their future and wellbeing. We know that, despite decades of conflict, many Israelis and Palestinians yearn for peace and are ready to follow leaders willing to pay the high price of peace. We believe, as Christian scripture says, that all those who work for peace will indeed be blessed.

Yours sincerely,
Rev. Dr Samuel Kobia
General secretary

- **Statement made at the United Nations General Assembly Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People: Solemn Commemoration of the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People, 29 November 2007**

By Rev. Chris Ferguson, WCC Representative to the UN.

“On behalf of the international community of civil society”

Mr Chairman, Mr Secretary General, Mr President of the General Assembly, Mr President of the Security Council, Excellencies, Colleagues, Friends.

Let me begin with a deep expression of appreciation to the Committee of the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People for extending an invitation to civil society representatives to participate in this solemn commemoration of the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People. Not only has the Committee under the leadership of its Chairman Ambassador Paul Badji and other Committee members worked tirelessly to keep the Occupation and the situation of the Palestinian People before the International Community, they have done so forging a strong partnership with NGOs and International Civil Society. These efforts to keep diplomatic and political attention focus on the Palestinian People and their rights has never been more urgently needed nor more difficult than in this 40th year of the Occupation and the 60th year marking the Resolution on the UN Partition plan and, the 59th year since the *Nakba*.

It is both a great privilege and an impossible task for me to adequately “represent” international civil society. Those around the world including Palestinian and Israeli

NGOs and civil society groups who work in solidarity with the Palestinian People to end the illegal occupation and to achieve a just peace for all parties to the conflict are many and varied. There are movements, networks and groups in every continent in a growing and expanding mobilization of solidarity, support and determined non-violent action to end the occupation, protect the civilian population, and insist on the implementation of UN resolutions and international law through non-military solutions.. Civil Society and NGO actions not only span the world's regions we come from many sectors of society. Among the wide variety of groups visibly working for a comprehensive and just peace is the constant and growing action of the Churches and other faith based organizations.

This year of painfully significant dates is marked by great urgency in the face of the deepening suffering of the people in Gaza, the West Bank, East Jerusalem, and the refugees in the region and throughout the world.

The attention of the world was drawn to Annapolis. That meeting heralded a re-activation of a peace process. The WCC General Secretary Dr Sam Kobia sent a letter to the US Secretary of State and to Prime Minister Olmert and President Abbas laying out our view of the success and relevance of any actions taken. Post Annapolis the comments are of even greater relevance: and I quote...

“As this initiative is set to begin we would like to suggest three criteria for success based on 60 years of international church advocacy for peace in this conflict.

Good faith negotiations are the first criterion. The crux of the problem – the final status issues – will not yield without sustained and robust good faith negotiations by all sides. Experience has shown that the tactic of avoiding, delaying or diluting final status issues has lost all utility and credibility in peace initiatives to address this conflict.

Second, negotiations must recognize and involve those parties with legitimate interests at stake in the solution to the conflict. From the earliest possible juncture, peace negotiations must include their representatives in a meaningful and appropriate manner. The participation in Annapolis, now confirmed, of some states in the Arab Peace Initiative is an essential opening in this direction. The process you launch this week must be genuinely multilateral in order to advance the cause of peace.

Third, scrupulous adherence to the international rule of law is essential. Any agreement or process that you entertain will be judged against United Nations Security Council Resolutions and the treaty obligations of the parties involved, international human rights law and international humanitarian law.

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Churches. Similarly, the specific United Nations Security Council resolutions on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict are the architecture of peace. These include UNSCR 242, 338, 1397 and 1515, and UN General Assembly Resolution 194 on the question of Jerusalem and refugees.

Also, during negotiations, the negotiating parties' behaviour in Israel and the Occupied Territories must be governed by the same body of international law. Early action on ending the isolation of Gaza and the collective punishment of its 1.5 million residents, stopping attacks on civilians of either side, releasing prisoners denied due process on both sides, freezing all settlement growth of any kind, ceasing land expropriation, stopping work on the separation barrier, opening negotiations about the Occupied Golan Heights, and other well-known steps will empower the Annapolis process if implemented and will hobble and weaken it if not implemented. Such steps will also signal the level of good faith behind the Annapolis process – making reconciliation between the main Palestinian political groups, Fatah and Hamas, eminently more feasible.

We would submit that negotiations based on good faith, on multilateral participation and on the rule of law will require the US administration not only to convene, but also to ensure that the final agreement preserves the indivisibility of justice for Palestinians and Israelis.

It is critical to respond to the reality that negotiations with similar intentions in the past have been counter-productive, allowing the occupation to continue and intensify. Among the causes were the repeated failures to address core issues and to see those issues through in good faith to an equitable resolution. To meet and fail in the same manner yet again is, we believe, deeply and dangerously irresponsible at this point in the history of the conflict. ”

End quote...

And yet as we speak the international community remains woefully inactive and complicity silent in the face of the dramatically deteriorating situation in Gaza. There is some evident but insufficient attention paid to the desperate humanitarian crisis but no will or moral courage to address the gross and flagrant violation of international law and breach of the Fourth Geneva Convention by Israel in declaring Gaza an enemy entity and inflicting unconscionable collective punishment on 1.5 million people. The international community cannot and should not abandon the civilian population of Gaza and leave them without the protection they are guaranteed. Neither Palestinian internal conflicts nor “terrorizing” Qassam rocket attacks justify denying food, fuel, economic livelihood, medical care, freedom to travel and study not to mention the threat to cut off electricity to 1.5 million innocent civilians. Church related hospitals and clinics break our hearts daily with the reports of ill and injured children and, patients dying because they cannot travel for medical treatment or supplies are not available. 80% of the people live in poverty and 1.1 million survive on food hand-outs. This is an intentional and utterly illegal “starvation diet” designed to punish pressure the population – supposedly

to end rocket activity for which they are not responsible and cannot control. In large part the situation in Gaza is the further expression of the International Community boycotting and isolating Palestinians for the exercise of their democratic rights. The blind eye turned to the rights of civilians in Gaza to protection makes a mockery of all other UN pretensions to care for unarmed and defenseless civilians.

Peace must be built on rights for all and protection for all. The International community has failed and continues to fail to stand with the Palestinian people in Gaza, the West Bank and East Jerusalem and worldwide in ending the brutal military occupation, ongoing dispossession and securing the right to return. Crucially, this failure also impedes the peace, justice, security and rights that we seek and uphold for Israelis. This failure is an obstacle to regional peace and impacts on world insecurity and disorder.

We speak of a just peace based on full and scrupulous implementation of international law because we know that any lasting solution for the Palestinian people is intertwined with Peace and Justice for Israel. We actively seek the wellbeing of both peoples. We insist that both the Palestinian People and Israel have legitimate security concerns. We see that although religion is not at the root of the conflict, religion has become part of the problem and, therefore religious leaders and interreligious cooperation have to be part of the solution so that Christians, Muslims and Jews will again understand one another and live together as neighbors as they have in the past.

Knowing that there is no military solution this memory filled year has marked a re-invigoration of strong calls by international civil society to re-double efforts for non-violent actions.

Notably, the International Coordinating Network on Palestine meeting in Brussels in August of this year launched a strong and resolute plan of action under the title: 60 years is enough! End the dispossession; bring the refugees home! The Call to Action included a commitment to strengthen the global campaign for boycotts, divestment and sanctions (BDS) emphasizing that this campaign responds to a call from Palestinian civil society and is in the words of the Call to action” a non-violent effort against Israeli occupation, Apartheid and oppression.” The Network has further committed themselves to a campaign identifying and opposing Israeli policies as violations of the International Covenant against the Crime of Apartheid.

In June of this year the World Council of Churches convened an International Peace Conference of Churches from around the world in Amman, Jordan. The Amman Call which emerged from that meeting is not meant to be another statement but simply the visible sign of a renewed commitment to “church advocacy for peace, aimed at ending the illegal occupation in accordance with UN resolutions and demonstrate its commitment to interreligious action for peace and justice that serves all the peoples of the region.”

The meeting launched a new initiative: The Palestine Israel Ecumenical Forum, dedicated to church action for both Peace Making and Peace Building. In their own way churches

around the world are increasingly looking to non-violent methods like Morally Responsible Investment which use economic measures to end the occupation. This initiative will form strong inter religious alliances to break new ground and commit ourselves to what the Amman call named as “Costly Solidarity”. Civil Society in general and the Churches in particular are showing new vigour faced with the morally repugnant and unjustifiable situation. Costly Solidarity means taking non-violent, constructive actions which will cause discomfort, tensions and serious disagreements. Such solidarity is an ethical imperative.

We are committed to undertaking committed actions in solidarity and to holding the international community accountable to the norms and standards of International law for all. The Palestinian Rights can no longer be “exceptions to the rule” of International law.

Civil society in our various forms and for a have called on ourselves to re-commit to active campaigns for rights and freedoms. We have called and continue to call on the international community to embrace the principles of International law and the relevant UN resolutions and vigorously apply them. Churches have based their actions on respect for the Un Resolutions and the rule of law .There is an ethical and spiritual imperative to use laws and non-violent means to achieve peace and justice. The call is simple: Join us in costly solidarity. It is not easy. Nor should it be... but the dispossessed and oppressed Palestinian people have that right. All the peoples involved and affected by the conflict deserve no less. A just peace for Palestine and Israel demands it.

Thank you.

- **Minute on the humanitarian situation in the Gaza Strip, WCC central committee, Geneva, Switzerland, 13-20 February 2008**

In an alarming appeal regarding the plight of the people of Gaza, the heads of churches in Jerusalem on 22 January 2008 warned that, “one and a half million people are imprisoned and without proper food or medicine; 800,000 without electricity supply. This is illegal collective punishment, an immoral act in violation of international law. This cannot be tolerated any further. The siege over Gaza should end now”.

The humanitarian, human rights and political situation of the people of Gaza has been grave for years and is steadily worsening. The logic of policies imposed upon this tiny strip of territory is being pushed to new extremes. Public order is further threatened by pressures from within. The horizon for those who live in one of the most densely populated places on earth seems to shrink by the day.

In addition to the humanitarian needs noted above by the churches in Jerusalem, United Nations, non-governmental and church-related organizations working in the Gaza Strip report that more Gazans than ever – 80 percent of households – live below the poverty line and need food and direct assistance; that fuel shortages are crippling essential

services including sanitation and water supplies; that life-saving treatments are not available in local hospitals; that baby milk and cooking oil are scarce; that many public facilities have been destroyed by military attacks and that schools lack basic educational materials; that hundreds of businesses have gone bankrupt, half of the workforce is jobless and the economy is in collapse. While there is a need to move from meagre humanitarian aid to serious developmental assistance, some agencies have referred to the help allowed in from the outside world as a “drip-feed” of humanitarian aid.

Human rights violations exacerbate the humanitarian situation and have escalated with recent escalations in violence. “The right to life is imperilled for all in the region,” UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Louise Arbour, reported to a special session of the Human Rights Council last month. She noted that armed violations of the laws of war had killed seven civilians in nearby Israel last year where two towns are subjected to indiscriminate rocket attacks by militants in Gaza. She also reported that 131 Palestinian civilians were killed last year in attacks by Israeli forces on Gaza in targeted killings and in the use of disproportionate force.

Commissioner Arbour said that Palestinians generally, and especially the residents of Gaza, “are systematically deprived of the enjoyment of almost all their human rights and basic needs”. The movement of people, goods and services to and from Gaza is greatly restricted, especially along the border with Israel. Assessing the right to food, the World Food Programme reports that basic food imports are only half what is required. Regarding the right to health, the World Health Organization reports that the blockade’s impact seriously compromises health services and related infrastructure. The rights of work, education and adequate housing are also at risk.

All the authorities directly involved, the *de facto* Hamas authority and the Palestinian authority – to the extent that they exercise control – as well as the government of Israel, have primary obligations to protect the population of Gaza under international human rights and humanitarian law. Other governments are indirectly involved, such as European Union members paying for the reduced ration of fuel.

Rather than accept the isolation and punishment of Gaza, it is in the interests of all parties involved to work out the political reintegration of Gaza with the rest of the occupied Palestinian territory. Any credible peace process must allow for reconciliation between Palestinian parties and involve all the elected representatives of the Palestinian people. Meanwhile, the launching of rockets, suicide bombings, the targeting of civilians, as well as the collective punishment of Gaza, and other actions such as settlements, road blocks, indefinite detentions and killings without trial, do not and will not make for peace.

Accordingly, as the World Council of Churches we express our deep sadness at the humanitarian situation in Gaza, increasing alarm at the incessant violations of human rights and on-going losses of life among Palestinians and Israelis, and grave concerns at the future of the peace process for both Israel and Palestine. A chorus of international concern is calling for an end to the blockade of Gaza and reminding the government of Israel that collective punishment is prohibited by the Geneva Convention that governs its

conduct in Gaza. We join our voices to these calls for mercy and justice, again. We do so today and for as long as the suffering continues, believing that a future for all can and will be found.

The Amman conference was called to spur us to work for peace, because people living under and with endemic injustice still yearn for a just peace despite 60 years of conflict and despair. The “Amman Call” commits us with the churches of the Holy Land in the Middle East to “act and pray and speak and work and risk reputations and lives to build with them bridges for an enduring peace among the peoples of this tortured and beautiful place”.

The central committee of the World Council of Churches, meeting in Geneva, Switzerland, 13–20 February 2008:

- A. ***Calls urgently***, with the churches of the Holy Land, and with the Middle East Council of Churches, for an immediate lifting of the blockade of Gaza;
- B. ***Requests*** member churches to continue to remind the government of Israel of the need to fulfil its international obligations as an occupying power, under the Geneva Conventions, to guarantee the provision of food, medicine, fuel and water supplies and essential services, such as electricity and sanitation, to the Gaza Strip;
- C. ***Recognizes*** that civilians are being attacked and killed in both Israel and the occupied Palestinian territories and reiterates its absolute condemnation of attacks on civilians;
- D. ***Charges*** member churches to watch that all authorities exercising control and governmental functions in and over Gaza respect international human rights law and international humanitarian law and encourage them to fulfil its requirements;
- E. ***Calls*** member churches to speak out for the people of Gaza, in public and with their governments, calling for an end to the siege, an end to the collective punishments and a negotiated ceasefire;
- F. ***Commends*** churches and church-related organizations working to stop third-party governments, such as the European Union and the United States, from providing financial assistance to the occupying power for actions concerning Gaza that are wrongful and illegal under international law; and further ***recommends*** that other churches take up such entreaties to governments involved;
- G. ***Calls*** the fellowship of churches in the WCC to pray for an end of the suffering in Gaza and progress toward a just and lasting peace between Palestinians and Israelis;

H. *Invites* member churches of the WCC to receive and affirm the “Amman Call” of June 2007 that launched the Palestine Israel Ecumenical Forum and to come together in advocacy for peace under the forum, including the Ecumenical Accompaniment Programme in Palestine and Israel, debating theological positions related to the conflict, and a global week of International Church Action for Peace in Palestine and Israel, 4-10 June 2008.

- **Open letter from WCC general secretary condemning the attacks on civilians in the Gaza strip and in Israel, 3 March 2008**

Since the middle of last week more than 110 Palestinians and three Israelis have been killed by attacks across the Israel-Gaza border. Most of the dead are civilians and one-third of the dead are reportedly children. Our hearts go out to the parents and families of those killed, newly bereaved like so many before them. May God comfort them in their pain and sorrow, and may God move the hearts of those powers and authorities who hold the keys to peace.

We absolutely condemn these deadly attacks on civilians by the Israeli military on Gaza and by militants firing rockets from Gaza, reiterating the call of the central committee of the World Council of Churches just days ago after the previous round of killings. Incessant violations of life and of human rights must stop. We call on the government of Israel, the occupying power, to fulfil its legal obligations to the people of Gaza under the Geneva Conventions. The blockade that has systematically deprived Gazans of almost all their rights must end. Food, fuel, medicine and essential services for Gaza must be guaranteed, as the WCC central committee noted and we repeat today.

We also call member churches to speak out for the people of Gaza now and join in an international initiative to promote peace in the weeks ahead. The WCC central committee has invited member churches to join in a week of International Church Action for Peace in Palestine and Israel, 4-10 June 2008. More than a dozen countries are planning education, advocacy and public witness activities. Others are invited to do the same. All churches are asked to join churches in Jerusalem and Bethlehem in a worldwide prayer for peace on Sunday, 8 June 2008, as part of the week.

Indiscriminate attacks are causing deep sorrow and outrage among churches and citizens in the Occupied Palestinian Territories, in Israel, and around the world. Meanwhile, the path to peace stands open but empty. It is especially incumbent on governments using or allowing the use of overwhelming military power to turn away from violence and oppression and take responsibility for negotiating a justice and lasting peace.

Rev. Dr Samuel Kobia,
WCC general secretary

- **Open statement from WCC general secretary “strongly condemning” the shootings at the Mercaz Harav Yeshiva and expressing sympathy to families of those killed or injured, 10 March 2008**

"We express our sincere sorrow and sympathy to the families of those who were killed or injured in the shootings last week at the Mercaz Harav Yeshiva in Jerusalem," said World Council of Churches (WCC) General Secretary Rev. Dr Samuel Kobia on 10 March, joining his voice to those of the Heads of Churches in Jerusalem. "An attack on a Jewish seminary has a profound impact on all people of faith. The World Council of Churches strongly condemns this attack."

Referring to a statement issued one week ago condemning the attacks on civilians in the Gaza strip and Israel, he reiterated his call for the "incessant violations of life and human rights to stop." "Such acts of terror are abhorrent," he said. "A grim reminder of the continuing cycle of violence, they increase the sense of grief, sorrow, anger and outrage among both Israelis and Palestinians."

"Despite the tragic consequences of this situation, rather than allow it to inflame more violence, we pray that it will encourage all those concerned to redouble their efforts, to all the more vigorously pursue peace." said Kobia.

- **Open comment by WCC general secretary on the occasion of 60 years since the disintegration of the Palestinian state and the creation of the state of Israel, 9 May 2008**

Just as 2008 marks 60 years of aspirations dedicated to securing a homeland for Israelis, 2008 also marks 60 years of the disintegration of Palestinian society and dispersal of some 750,000 Palestinians as refugees. To date, the situation in the Palestinian Territories reflects the absence of peace and a continuation of occupation and conflict. While Israelis celebrate the 60th anniversary of their state, Palestinians are marking six decades of displacement and dispossession.

May this anniversary year cause us all to recommit to the goal both Israelis and Palestinians share that neither can attain without the other, namely, a just peace.

To that end, from 4 to 10 June 2008, WCC member churches and related organizations on five continents are organizing a collective public witness for peace. From Australia to Canada, Norway to Sri Lanka to South Africa, churches will observe this anniversary year with a week of awareness-raising and advocacy called International Church Action for Peace in Palestine and Israel. It is time, we believe, for both nations to share a just peace.

Rev. Dr Samuel Kobia
WCC General secretary

- **Message from Global week of International Church Action for Peace in Palestine and Israel, 4-10 June 2008**

It's time for Palestine

It's time for Palestine.

It's time for Palestinians and Israelis to share a just peace.

It's time to respect human lives in the land called holy.

It's time for healing to begin in wounded souls.

It's time to end 60 years of conflict, oppression and fear.

It's time for freedom from occupation.

It's time for equal rights.

It's time to stop discrimination, segregation and restrictions on movement.

It's time for those who put up walls and fences to build them on their own property.

It's time to stop bulldozing one community's homes and building homes for the other community on land that is not theirs.

It's time to do away with double standards.

It's time for Israeli citizens to have security and secure borders agreed with their neighbours.

It's time for the international community to implement 60 years of United Nations resolutions.

It's time for Israel's government to complete the bargain offered in the Arab Peace Initiative.

It's time for those who represent the Palestinian people to all be involved in making peace.

It's time for people who have been refugees for 60 years to regain their rights and a permanent home.

It's time to assist settlers in the Occupied Palestinian Territories to make their home in Israel.

It's time for self-determination.

It's time for foreigners to visit Bethlehem and other towns imprisoned by the wall.

It's time to see settlements in their comfort and refugee camps in their despair.

It's time for people living 41 years under occupation to feel new solidarity from a watching world.

It's time to name the shame of collective punishment and to end it in all its forms.

It's time to be revolted by violence against civilians and for civilians on both sides to be safe.

It's time for both sides to release their prisoners and give those justly accused a fair trial.

It's time to reunite the people of Gaza, the West Bank and East Jerusalem.

It's time for all parties to obey international humanitarian and human rights law.

It's time to share Jerusalem as the capital of two nations and a city holy to three religions.
It's time for Muslim, Jewish and Christian communities to be free to visit their holy sites.
It's time in Palestine as in Israel for olive trees to flourish and grow old.

It's time to honour all who have suffered, Palestinians and Israelis.
It's time to learn from past wrongs.
It's time to understand pent-up anger and begin to set things right.
It's time for those with blood on their hands to acknowledge what they have done.
It's time to seek forgiveness between communities and to repair a broken land together.
It's time to move forward as human beings who are all made in the image of God.

All who are able to speak truth to power must speak it.
All who would break the silence surrounding injustice must break it.
All who have something to give for peace must give it.
For Palestine, for Israel and for a troubled world,

It's time for peace.

- ***“Bern Perspective”*. Final document from the Palestine Israel Ecumenical Forum (PIEF) International Theological Conference “Promised Land”, 13 September 2008**

The Amman Call, issued in June 2007, as the result of the World Council of Churches international peace conference in Amman, Jordan, put forth the urgent plea from Palestinian Christians to their brothers and sisters in Christ: “Enough is enough. No more words without deeds. It is time for action.” Through the Call, the churches were challenged to not remain silent in the face of suffering.

This international and broadly ecumenical conference within the framework of the Palestine Israel Ecumenical Forum, held in Bern, Switzerland, co-hosted by the WCC with the Federation of Swiss Protestant Churches and the Reformed Churches Bern-Jura-Solothurn, was convened to help different parts of the body of Christ join together in the work of addressing biblical and theological issues in Christian discourse about the conflict in Palestine-Israel. The theme of the conference – The Promised Land – provided both grounds for exploring scripture and a material foundation for engaging with the contemporary conflict between Israelis and Palestinians.

The 85 participants in the conference discerned the need to spend time and energy attending to the diversity of perspectives within the Christian family. The early planning process determined that a significant proportion of participants would be invited from Palestine-Israel and the Middle East. One aspect of this was the opportunity to hear Palestinian Christians speak of their experience as well as their theological understandings of land and the promises of God.

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After decades of dispossession, discrimination, illegal occupation, violence and bloodshed in Palestine-Israel, Christians are challenged to continue to study, critique and re-vision theologies of land in order to promote life-affirming Christian visions and responses to the conflict. This process explores both the contexts in which our theologies were created and their consequences for millions of human lives.

This conference gave preferential option to the voices of Palestinian and Middle Eastern Christian theologians. At several points, participants were made painfully aware that because Christians worldwide have differing vocations, situations, perspectives, interests and solidarities, they also hold to different views of land. Because of our shared hope in the risen Lord, we are confident that these differences do not preclude mutual transformation.

During the conference Christian scholars from diverse perspectives presented papers for discussion on a variety of topics, including land and God's promises, the Abraham paradigm, the Church and Israel, and the "people of God." Together we have witnessed the transformative potential of the encounter among Christians holding vastly different views.

A central issue for the conference was how the Bible is read. We are called to acknowledge the context of our interpretations and to recognize distinctions between biblical history and biblical story as well as distinctions between the Israel of the Bible and the modern State of Israel. In these distinctions, we are challenged to comprehend the philosophical underpinnings of our interpretations and their ethical implications. The contemporary conflict in Palestine-Israel resounds with biblical metaphors. However, there was significant consensus in the conference that the Bible must not be utilized to justify oppression or supply simplistic commentary on contemporary events, thus sacralizing the conflict and ignoring its socio-political, economic and historical dimensions. We are called not only to expose manipulations of Scripture that ignore context and complexity, but to offer readings of the text that promote the values of God's kingdom: justice, peace, reconciliation, and forgiveness.

Throughout the conference, we were made aware of the significant contribution of European and North American theologies for Jewish-Christian healing, and their opening of new horizons for Christian theology. It is our hope that these theologies would be enriched by ongoing dialogue with the realities of the situation in Palestine-Israel and dialogue with Muslims worldwide. Christians from within the context of Palestine-Israel, who also have their own relationship with Jews, must be welcomed as companions in theological reflection on these matters as we discern together, in a spirit of mutual enrichment, the mission to which we are called.

+ + +

As with many ambitious conferences, we sought to accomplish too much in too short a time. There was more information than transformation.

Let us continue, then, to build trusting relationships that will allow for transformation which can come about only through continued dialogue and constructive confrontation in the spirit of Christian unity.

Let us continue in developing a theological discourse about land, life on the land and living together in the land that is sensitive, promotes respect among ourselves and with others within both intra-Christian and interreligious contexts, particularly in dialogue with Jews and Muslims, and which avoids any kind of teaching of contempt. One important focus of this development will be theological reflection on international law and human rights.

Let us affirm that a new discourse on these issues develops as a new generation emerges. Therefore, our churches should commit themselves to ecumenical and interreligious formation.

Let us continue to critically and creatively examine notions of the “Promised Land”, rediscovering in the Bible and in our traditions life-giving metaphors for promoting justice, peace, reconciliation and forgiveness for the fullness of the earth and all its inhabitants.

Let us open this dialogue to include approaches to reading the Bible and doing theology that have emerged from other contexts of conflict, landlessness, dispossession, oppression and exclusion so that we might more rigorously analyze the conflict, interrogate ideologies like antisemitism and Christian Zionism, and contribute toward peace making and peace building in Palestine-Israel.

- **Open statement on the Gaza crisis by WCC general secretary, 29 December 2008**

The first word to say to the violence against Gaza is ‘Stop’. Over 300 lives lost, more than 1,000 people wounded, uncounted thousands traumatized, bombardment of one of the most densely populated places on earth... this must stop immediately. Governments in the region and abroad, the Arab League, the United States, the European Union, and the United Nations must use their good offices to see that all those who are at risk are protected, on both sides of the border, and must ensure access for emergency and medical aid. The deaths and suffering of the last three days are dreadful and shameful and will achieve nothing but more deaths and suffering.

People around the world are looking for change that brings peace closer in the Middle East. A terrible period of deadlock and deprivation has now erupted into greater violence. Policies that rely on cutting off shipments of food, medicine and fuel for 1.5 million Gazans and on sending rockets across borders at random or ‘surgically’ only confirm how far from the path of peace the current authorities have strayed. To use ground forces would deepen the current disaster. Collective punishment against one’s neighbours is illegal and has no place in building peace.

In the countries involved in this conflict, churches and church members are looking to their governments to take up the urgent work of securing a viable future for Palestinians, Israelis and their neighbours. The tired logic of public officials blaming others while denying their own government's responsibilities has led to the loss of many lives. Governments need now to be accountable for peace.

At the beginning of 2008, the World Council of Churches central committee condemned attacks on civilians in and around Gaza, called for all who exercise authority over Gaza including the government of Israel and Hamas to respect international humanitarian and human rights law, and urged member churches to pray and work for a just and lasting peace between Israelis and Palestinians.

At the end of 2008, in this season of religious celebrations, it is a tragedy that the same measures are more necessary than ever. Our prayer is that the New Year will bring new courage, new leadership and new commitment to the difficult work of peace in the Middle East.

Rev. Dr Samuel Kobia
General secretary
World Council of Churches

- **Letter from WCC general secretary to H. E. Mr Ban Ki-moon, UN secretary general, conveying WCC's support for the leadership and work of the United Nations in Gaza during the present crisis, 7 January 2009**

Your Excellency,

This letter comes to you with heartfelt greetings for a New Year and for the success of your many endeavours as Secretary-General of the United Nations in the months ahead. We have followed your work during 2008 with high interest and look back with appreciation on your visit to the World Council of Churches in March last year.

It is regretful that a first letter in 2009 should be occasioned by the tragic events unfolding in Gaza. However, I am writing to convey my support for the constructive leadership you have given and also for the courageous work of the United Nations in the crisis zone.

We note and affirm your continuing focus on the safety and well-being of the people suffering from the violence in and around Gaza, and share your alarm at the escalation of the violence.

We look urgently for the prompt implementation of the steps mentioned in the press statement made by the president of the Security Council on 28 December 2008, *inter alia*, an immediate halt to all military activities, addressing the humanitarian and economic needs in Gaza, opening border crossings, and providing food, fuel and medical supplies.

It is clear, however, that the interests of the people of Gaza, of Palestinians and of the international community are not adequately served by a response that mostly addresses only the terrible humanitarian situation in Gaza.

There can be no question that the UN has and must exercise a unique broader role, as you have noted, of reaching the level of international commitment that is necessary to reverse and *resolve* this crisis. We look to the United Nations at every level to be the voice insisting during this crisis on the broader framework of international law that is the only credible basis for a durable and just solution.

This includes obligations of member states embedded in the UN Charter, in UN resolutions, in international human rights and humanitarian law. Your leadership on these matters is vital and we encourage you in this regard.

Please know that the WCC is actively engaged in efforts to resolve this crisis via our UN Liaison Office in New York, here in Geneva, and with member churches and related humanitarian agencies. We are calling the governments involved not only to secure a ceasefire and relieve the suffering in Gaza, but also to return to “the urgent work of securing a viable future for Palestinians, Israelis and their neighbours” and for governments to “be accountable for peace” (WCC statement, 29/12/08).

The prospects for peace in the Middle East depend on a reversal of the trends your special coordinator on the Middle East Peace Process, Robert Serry, warned about last week. This is crucial for the whole region, including the future of its historic Christian communities.

With hope for the peaceful resolution of this crisis, with prayers for progress toward peace with justice between Israelis and Palestinians, I remain,

Sincerely yours,
Rev. Dr Samuel Kobia
General secretary

cc: Lee Sang-hwa
First officer, Executive Office of the secretary-general
United Nations

- **Letter from WCC general secretary to member churches in the Middle East and churches in Jerusalem regarding a just peace in Israel and Palestine based on international resolutions, 7 January 2009**

Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. We are sending this letter as a word of encouragement to churches in the Middle East and sharing it with member churches around the world.

The international ecumenical family has heard your calls and is listening to your concerns over the crisis surrounding Gaza. It is fitting that, in these very weeks, the ecumenical prayer cycle invites believers in many lands to pray for the churches of the Middle East and for all the peoples among whom you serve. May the homeland of Jesus find the peace promised in the Christmas message and may God protect you and all your neighbours from the spiral of violence, antagonism and retribution now gripping Gaza and Israel.

We have heard the call for peace in the recent statement of the patriarchs and heads of churches in Jerusalem and agree that both parties to the conflict must “return to their senses and refrain from all violent acts, which only bring destruction and tragedy”. We join the churches in Jerusalem in their appeal to the international community finally to “resolve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict with a just and comprehensive solution based on international resolutions.”

In company with member churches, other ecumenical agencies and partners in the international community, the World Council of Churches is calling for an end to hostilities and a new commitment to a negotiated settlement that will assure a just and lasting peace to both Palestinians and Israelis. Such a peace must include respect by all authorities for international law as it applies to human rights, humanitarian aid and protection of civilians in conflict zones. It must reinstate the ceasefire on both sides of the border and speed the lifting of Israel’s blockade on Gaza.

All who receive this letter are invited to pray a prayer for peace from Palestine and Israel (see the end of this letter, or online). Please share it so that our community may pray to God with one voice.

The WCC is also asking churches and ministries to share information about actions they are taking at this time to promote peace with justice.

We will continue to advocate practical action for peace on the part of governments, the Arab League, the European Union and the United Nations. “Raise your voices...speak ‘truth to power’ and name with courage the injustices we see and experience,” the Amman Call challenges us all. “The illegal occupation has stolen two generations of lives...and threatens the next with hopelessness and rage,” it continues, reminding at this time that half of Gaza’s 1.5 million people are under 18 years of age.

Today's crisis is much deeper than rockets and retaliation. As the central committee of the World Council of Churches noted early last year:

The humanitarian, human rights and political situation of the people of Gaza has been grave for years and is steadily worsening. The logic of policies imposed upon this tiny strip of territory is being pushed to new extremes. Public order is further threatened by pressures from within. The horizon for those who live in one of the most densely populated places on earth seems to shrink by the day.

Through all the days of 2008, the situation grew worse. Now, we are calling on Christians everywhere to pray for peace and, wherever possible, to inspire and encourage their leaders in the constructive work that leads beyond enmity to reconciliation. As a new year dawns, we pray for you with a prayer from Palestine and Israel.

God of mercy and compassion,
Of grace and reconciliation,
Pour your power upon all your children in the Middle East.
Let hatred be turned into love, fear to trust,
Despair to hope, oppression to freedom,
Occupation to liberation,
That violent encounters may be replaced by loving embraces,
And peace and justice could be experienced by all. Amen.

From *Imagine Peace*, a devotional resource from the WCC Decade to Overcome Violence, 2008.

Yours in Christian love and service,
The Rev. Dr Samuel Kobia
General secretary of the World Council of Churches

cc: WCC member churches outside the Middle East

- **Statement on the Gaza War adopted by WCC executive committee, 17–20 February 2009**

“In the very place where Jesus Christ walked upon the earth, walls now separate families and the children of God – Christian, Muslim and Jew – are imprisoned in a deepening cycle of violence, humiliation and despair.” Amman Call, WCC International Peace Conference, June 2007, Jordan

The Gaza war during Christmas season took a terrible toll on lives and communities that were already fragile. Bombs, missiles and rockets striking densely populated areas spread an unconscionable sorrow from Gaza to much of the world. Approximately 1400

Palestinians are dead – mostly civilians, children and women – thousands more are wounded, countless thousands are traumatized, and there remains widespread destruction and damage to homes and institutions including church clinics and a hospital. Four civilians are dead in neighbouring Israel and 11 soldiers were killed during the fighting and many other people injured.

The humanitarian situation in Gaza remains extremely alarming. More than one million people, 80 percent of the population, depend on food aid. Thousands of jobs have been lost. The educational and health systems have broken down due to the blockade that is still being imposed by the Israeli government. Palestinian church leaders, representatives from Action by Churches Together International and other humanitarian aid workers have been denied access to Gaza.

Still violence continues and the word peace is rarely spoken. With concerned people in many countries, we speak now to mourn the dead and to cry out with the wounded. The war and the political decisions behind it have deepened an intolerable spiral of despair, violence and deaths.

All the lives lost are sacred. Civilians were trapped in the war zone and had no way to escape. All of us who are part of the international community failed in our obligation to stop the killings. Governments failed to fulfill their legal obligations to prevent or remedy the Gaza war under the terms of international law and international humanitarian law. Such failure discredits international law and gives encouragement to those who rely on the use of force.

The Gaza war brought people onto the streets in cities around the world while those responsible for the enforcement of international law stood by doing little to nothing. Israel, like any other state, has the right of self defense, but is also bound by humanitarian principles of proportionality and distinction. The imperative to protect human lives is mandatory for all parties involved – including the international community. All have failed in this responsibility. Civilians have suffered on both sides. However, as the United Nations special rapporteur for Human Rights noted, “the scale of civilian harm resulting from Israeli unlawful conduct was far greater than that of Palestinian unlawful conduct.” Furthermore, given the evidence of possible war crimes, the international community has a “responsibility to protect” the population at grave risk in Gaza because the government responsible for them has failed to do so.

What happened in Gaza is not an isolated tragedy. It is to be seen in the context of the illegal occupation of Palestinian territory that began in 1967. In the case of Gaza the last three years have seen siege and collective punishment harden into a stringent 18-month blockade. Without an end to the occupation, the cycle of violence continues.

Israel’s future, its well-being and security depend on a just and genuine peace. The same is true for any prospective Palestinian state. Failure to achieve a just and peaceful resolution of the conflict will open the future to more violence and war. Indeed, while

world attention was focused on Gaza, the expansion of settlements and violence against Palestinians continued in the rest of Occupied Palestinian Territory.

Gaza's suffering should serve as a reminder to governments to carry out their third state responsibility. International law requires states not to knowingly aid or assist another state in internationally unlawful acts and not to recognize such acts as lawful. They bear indirect responsibility if they assist or recognize such acts, for example, the illegal use of force and violations of laws and rights that take place daily in Gaza, the West Bank and East Jerusalem.

Palestinians who take up arms are also accountable under the law for their use of force. We join the international condemnation of the violence perpetrated by members of Hamas and other groups against civilians in Israel and against their own people.

Palestinian unity is essential not only for ending the occupation but also for eventually building a viable Palestinian state. Members of the international community bear partial responsibility for policies that divided people and political structures in the Occupied Palestinian Territory. It is incumbent on the international community now to actively and responsibly support the reintegration of Palestinian political processes including elections and the reunification of Gaza, the West Bank and East Jerusalem.

We extend our solidarity to all Palestinians and Israelis who engage in the peaceful pursuit of national Palestinian independence and non-violent resistance to foreign occupation. Non-violent resistance is a right of people living under occupation. We encourage people of all nationalities, religions and good will to support the non-violent struggle for a comprehensive and just peace.

We recall the many WCC policy statements that bear on present challenges, including those addressing the siege of Gaza (2008), the Amman Call to churches (2007), the need to engage with all the elected representatives of the Palestinian people (2006), assessing Israel's pullback from Gaza and ending economic ties to the occupation (2005), plus regular condemnation of all attacks against civilians and consistent church support for the implementation of UN resolutions as the basis for peace.

Accordingly, the executive committee of the World Council of Churches, meeting in Bossey, Switzerland, 17-20 February 2009:

A. **Commends** the many churches, related ministries, international church organizations, regional and national councils of churches, and civil society groups including Jewish and Muslim organizations that responded to the tragedy in Gaza with prayer, advocacy and aid.

B. **Invites** greater church engagement in joint efforts for peace, including broader participation in the Ecumenical Accompaniment Programme in Palestine and Israel (EAPPI), in the WCC-led World Week for Peace in Palestine Israel, 4-10 June 2009, and in other initiatives of the Palestine Israel Ecumenical Forum.

C. *Calls* member churches and related organizations, wherever applicable, to hold their own governments to account for third state responsibilities in the Israel-Palestine conflict under international law.

D. *Recommends* that member churches and related organizations in a position to do so practice morally responsible investment and purchasing in regard to corporations whose products or services support the occupation of Palestinian territory.

E. *Calls for* the United Nations to investigate alleged war crimes and other violations of international humanitarian law and human rights law by the parties to the Gaza conflict, including the use of weapons that have indiscriminate effects; and *calls for* the full implementation of UN Security Council Resolution 1860 which requires *inter alia* that the government of Israel lift the siege of Gaza.

F. *Urges* the government of Switzerland as the repository of the Geneva Conventions to convene an international conference of the high contracting parties of the 4th Geneva Convention to investigate armed violations against civilian populations by the parties to the conflict.

G. *Supports* proposals that churches and governments which funded aid and infrastructure projects in Gaza hold the government of Israel accountable for the destruction it has caused during the war and demand compensation for the same.

H. *Calls on* the government of Israel to facilitate the on-going work of United Nations agencies in Occupied Palestinian Territory including access for the UN special rapporteur for Human Rights to the populations living under occupation; and *also calls on* the government of Israel to facilitate unimpeded access to Gaza for humanitarian aid workers, rehabilitation and reconstruction teams, pastoral delegations and clergy of religious congregations there.

I. *Affirms* Palestinian Christians in their endeavors to promote Palestinian unity, be of service to society, minister to their church members and join civil society in peaceful and non-violent measures to bring the occupation to an end.

- **Letter from WCC general secretary to Mr Barack Obama, president of the U.S.A., expressing concern at the recent war in Gaza, the current situation there and Gaza's essential role in the search for Israeli-Palestinian peace, 3 March 2009**

Dear Mr President:

We write with a particular and timely concern that is conveyed with the same general good wishes that the World Council of Churches and member churches in the US extended to you when you took office.

The concern is Gaza and its essential part in the search for Israeli-Palestinian peace. We would like to bring to your attention a 'Statement on the Gaza War' issued in February by the World Council of Churches executive committee. We would also share it with your Secretary of State and your special envoy to the Middle East.

The churches speaking through the statement are at pains to point out that the Gaza tragedy shared by Palestinians and Israelis is not an isolated tragedy. We call certain governments, the United Nations and our member churches to fulfill specific obligations related to restitution, rehabilitation and conflict-resolution – and to do so within the larger framework of peace with justice.

Thank you for your and your Administration's attention to the points raised therein.

We are following the current new engagement of the US Government in the Middle East. The news regularly brings information from there and elsewhere as your government takes up the task of translating fresh policies into new programs. With that in mind and as a reflection of the international church attention to US constructive, multilateral initiatives coming from Washington, I would like to reiterate my proposal for a possible meeting with you. I would appreciate such a meeting at your earliest convenience and particularly in the course of March 2009.

With the hope of forward movement over Gaza and for the entire Middle East, we pray that God will bless and sustain you and your colleagues.

Sincerely yours,
Rev. Dr Samuel Kobia
General secretary

cc Ms. Hillary Rodham Clinton, USA secretary of state
Mr George Mitchell, special envoy for the Middle East

- **Letter from WCC general secretary to H.E. Mr Mahmoud Abbas, president of the Palestinian National Authority, voicing support for all parties to the conflict to fulfil specific obligations under international law, 11 March 2009**

Your Excellency,

We would like to bring to your attention the attached 'Statement on the Gaza War' issued in February by the World Council of Churches executive committee.

The WCC member churches speaking through the statement are at pains to point out that the Gaza tragedy is shared by Palestinians and Israelis and is not an isolated tragedy. We hold that a viable future for Gaza and the well-being of its people are essential elements in what is surely one of the highest aspirations shared by the Palestinian and Israeli peoples – the search for peace.

The statement calls certain governments, the United Nations and all parties to the conflict to fulfill specific obligations under international law related to the difficult process of recovery, restitution, rehabilitation and conflict resolution. In that light, we commend Recommendation 'G' in its call for "the full implementation of UN Security Council Resolution 1860 which requires *inter alia* that the government of Israel lift the siege of Gaza."

As you know well and as reports of the UN Office for Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs have attested each week since the cease fire, this matter remains of grave concern.

Encouraged by news of talks on national unity, we also bring a second recommendation to your attention. "The executive committee of the World Council of Churches, meeting in Bossey, Switzerland, 16-20 February 2009:

- I. *Affirms* Palestinian Christians in their endeavours to promote Palestinian unity, be of service to society, minister to their church members and join civil society in peaceful and non-violent measures to bring the occupation to an end."

The statement and this letter are written with a view to the larger framework of working for peace with justice. We pray that such a framework will shape the post-war actions of all parties to the conflict. We thank you for your government's attention and for action in this regard.

Sincerely yours,
Rev. Dr Samuel Kobia
General secretary

Enc. 'Statement on the Gaza War'

- **Letter from WCC general secretary to H.E. Mr Ehud Olmert, prime minister of the State of Israel, expressing the concern of churches during and following the war in Gaza, 11 March 2009**

Your Excellency,

We write to convey a long standing international concern which churches have voiced repeatedly and again following the war and the continuing crisis in Gaza. We would like to bring to your attention the attached 'Statement on the Gaza War' issued in February by the World Council of Churches executive committee.

The WCC member churches speaking through the statement are at pains to point out that the Gaza tragedy is shared by Palestinians and Israelis and is not an isolated tragedy. We hold that a viable future for Gaza and the well-being of its people are essential elements in what is surely one of the highest aspirations shared by the Israeli and Palestinian peoples – the search for peace.

One of the statement's recommendations bears directly on the Government of Israel. As reports of the UN Office for Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs have attested each week since the cease fire, this matter remains of grave concern. "The executive committee of the World Council of Churches, meeting in Bossey, Switzerland, 16-20 February 2009:

“Calls on the government of Israel to facilitate the on-going work of United Nations agencies in Occupied Palestinian Territory including access for the UN special rapporteur for Human Rights to the populations living under occupation; and also calls on the government of Israel to facilitate unimpeded access to Gaza for humanitarian aid workers, rehabilitation and reconstruction teams, pastoral delegations and clergy of religious congregations there.”

The statement urges certain governments, the United Nations and all parties to the conflict to fulfill specific obligations under international law related to the difficult process of recovery, restitution, rehabilitation and conflict-resolution. In that light, we commend the whole document to you including Recommendation 'G' which calls for the investigation of "alleged war crimes and other violations of international humanitarian law and human rights law by the parties to the Gaza conflict, including the use of weapons that have indiscriminate effects; and *calls for* the full implementation of UN Security Council Resolution 1860 which requires *inter alia* that the government of Israel lift the siege of Gaza."

The statement and this letter are written with a view to the larger framework of working for peace with justice. We pray that such a framework will shape the post-war actions of all parties to the conflict. These are widely held hopes. We thank you for your Government's attention and for action in this regard.

Sincerely yours,
Rev. Dr Samuel Kobia
General secretary

- **Letter from WCC general secretary to WCC member churches, CWCs, REOs, specialized ministries and IEOs calling them to share their concerns about Gaza with their governments, 2 April 2009**

Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

It has been made painfully clear to all of us again this year that peace in the Middle East and in other parts of the world cannot be separated from the need for a just peace in Israel/Palestine.

Many member churches are again raising their voices around this long-standing concern. We would like to thank all who have done so and encourage continuing efforts. It is especially important that churches find ways to give a considered and faithful witness for peace *together*. This letter shares two such opportunities.

Follow-up actions: Gaza War and its aftermath

The WCC executive committee invites you as churches to:

- Share your concerns about the Gaza conflict with your government;
- Add your voice to calls for the independent investigation of possible violations by both sides of humanitarian law;
- Let Palestinian Christians know that you support their endeavours to promote Palestinian unity.

The enclosed Statement on the Gaza War notes these and other steps. Responding could mean a letter, a visit or joint actions, depending on context and capacity.

Invitation: ‘World Week for Peace in Palestine Israel, 4-10 June 2009’

More and more churches are joining this annual week of action each year.

It began with a handful of churches after the Porto Alegre assembly and last year reached 40 countries. During the week, churches and specialized ministries are invited to participate in joint actions, as able:

- Prayer
- Education
- Advocacy

All participants may pray with a prayer from the churches in Jerusalem. They may also choose to reach out to parishes, the public or government. The focus is a negotiated peace that secures the legitimate rights and future of both peoples in the conflict, in keeping with decades of ecumenical and church policies.

Please read the enclosed Invitation and Fact Sheet for more information about this “World Week” of action. Also see www.worldweekforpeace.org.

Two months after the ceasefire, the two-year blockade of Gaza is back in place. “Access for humanitarian relief items remains a priority since efforts to resume basic services and

implement humanitarian and early recovery programmes are limited in the absence of reconstruction materials and spare parts. Amounts and types of deliveries reaching Gaza continue being subject to random restrictions and unpredictable clearance procedures," (UN OCHA report, 26/3/09). Tens of thousands of people remain homeless and most of their 20,000 destroyed or damaged dwellings are still in ruins.

Failed policies of certain key governments toward Gaza have not changed either. Please note, however, that many governments are committed to positive changes in policy. All are members of the United Nations, which has an essential role in Gaza and in the struggle for peace, and comes under much pressure as a result.

During the Gaza war more than 100 churches and ministries related to the WCC made public statements, contacted their government directly, or spoke to media. A summary is available on the WCC web site. The members of the WCC executive committee recognized this important demonstration of concern. This letter invites further prayer and action among us. May it be a sign of our service to the One who is called the Prince of Peace.

Yours in Christ,
Rev. Dr Samuel Kobia
General secretary

- **Activity of the World Week for Peace in Palestine Israel led by the WCC to generate joint church action for a just peace, 4-10 June 2009**

Change is in the air, as churches do week for Middle East peace

Change is in the air as churches in many parts of the world hold a "World Week for Peace in Palestine Israel" that began on 4 June 2009. New voices are advocating steps toward peace that churches have been promoting for years.

"It's time for us to act on what everyone knows is true," US President Barack Obama said in his address to the Muslim world from Cairo, 4 June, in the section specifically dealing with the Israel-Palestine conflict. "It's time for Israelis and Palestinians to share a just peace," says the message that churches are using for the World Council of Churches-led action week, 4-10 June 2009.

To begin the week in Bethlehem, local participants projected prayers for peace onto the "separation wall" at night. As the week goes on, prayers are being read out loud at checkpoints, in schools and in refugee camps.

"There is really no situation that is intractable – none," said Nobel peace laureate and retired Anglican Archbishop of Capetown Desmond Tutu in a speech at the Ecumenical Institute in Bossey near Geneva, Switzerland, on Sunday, 7 June.

"Each [situation] is capable of being resolved, even this one that seemed so utterly intractable," he added, comparing the Palestine Israel conflict to the seemingly deadlocked situation in South Africa before the downfall of apartheid.

Meanwhile, in at least seven of the participating countries, church delegations have organized to meet government officials to urge concrete steps toward peace now.

"It's time for people who have been refugees for 60 years to regain their rights and a permanent home," the churches' action week message says. For 60 years "the Palestinian people, Christian and Muslim... have endured the pain of dislocation", the US president said in Cairo.

In Manila, the Philippines, Christian and Muslim groups came together on 5 June to pray, to demonstrate peacefully at the Israeli embassy, and for a candle-light vigil for peace.

"It's time to assist settlers in the Occupied Palestinian Territory to make their home in Israel," say WCC member churches and others who join the week. "It is time for these settlements to stop," said President Obama.

People and parishes in the European Union can get help in engaging local retailers about settlement products and lobbying their governments by using an advocacy paper on settlement products that was issued especially for this "World Week for Peace".

"All of us have a responsibility to work for the day... when Jerusalem is a secure and lasting home for Jews and Christians and Muslims," said the US president in Cairo. "It's time to share Jerusalem as the capital of two nations and a city holy to three religions," say the churches.

A public seminar in Norway tackled the topic of "Promised Land" as part of the action week. The 5 June event featured a pastor and author whose understanding had changed after a visit to the conflict zone.

"It's time to learn from past wrongs," says the World Week message. "It's time for equal rights. It's time to stop discrimination, segregation and restrictions on movement," it adds.

In Scotland, parliamentarians reported to church and civil society leaders on solidarity visits to people in Gaza – one of several events in the week of action there.

Two church groups in the UK visited a local Israeli-owned company that makes engines for drones used against Gaza. Then they prayed at a local church.

"Violence is a dead end," said the US president. "It's time to be revolted by violence," say the churches, "and for civilians on both sides to be safe."

Sunday, 7 June, is the focal point of "World Week for Peace in Palestine Israel" for many participants. An ecumenical service in East Jerusalem and services in dozens of countries

used a prayer from Jerusalem's church leaders. Many parishes worshipped with a special liturgy from Ireland that included testimonies from young Israelis and Palestinians.

Participants with access to the internet are invited to send prayers to Bethlehem for "World Week" and to use the prayers collected there in Spanish, German and Italian – now and in the future.

Now in its fourth year, the action week is organized by and offered to Protestant, Orthodox and Roman Catholic churches and related ministries. Pax Christi International is the bridge to people working for peace in the Catholic Church.

The goal is to pray, educate or advocate for a just peace in Israel-Palestine during one week in June. From Kenya to Canada, the UK, the US, Australia and Austria, individuals, congregations and organizations in some 40 countries take part in one or more of the suggested activities, judging from information received by WCC.

Eyewitness perspectives on Middle East peace

The Anglican primate of Ireland, directors of Christian development organizations in Europe and church leaders in Jerusalem have acted and spoken on peace for Israel and Palestine based on what each of them has seen on the ground.

A directors' delegation from APRODEV – the Association of World Council of Churches (WCC) related Development Organizations in Europe – who visited Gaza during the World Week for Peace in Palestine Israel, have urged Ministers of Foreign Affairs in the European Union (EU) to also go there and "witness for themselves the denigrating circumstances in which the people of Gaza live."

The delegation members, all of whom are EU citizens, "were particularly disappointed by the inappropriateness and ineffectiveness of the European Union policies to achieve peace," according to an APRODEV press release on the visit.

The Archbishop of Armagh and Primate of All Ireland Alan E. T. Harper has followed up on his own visit to Israel and Palestine by endorsing the WCC's Ecumenical Accompaniment Programme in Palestine and Israel (EAPPI). The Holy Land visit of Irish church leaders had also inspired a liturgy that was widely used in Ireland and beyond during the World Week for Peace.

Archbishop Harper is the 8th Anglican bishop and the first in Ireland to endorse EAPPI. In a letter of 2 June he wrote: "I am very willing publicly to endorse the work of the Ecumenical Accompaniment Programme in Palestine and Israel and wish to salute the brave and important work of the Ecumenical Accompaniers on the ground."

Also this month, the Heads of Churches in Jerusalem decided that they should re-issue their statement of September 2006 on "the Status of Jerusalem" as, even today, it sums up what they see as "the only way forward if there is to be peace in this land."

"Jerusalem, holy city and city of daily life for two peoples and three religions Jerusalem, heritage of humanity and holy city, is also the city of daily life for her inhabitants, both Palestinians and Israelis, Jews, Christians and Muslim, and for all who are linked to them by family ties as well as for those for whom Jerusalem is the location of their prayer, of their schools, hospitals and work places," the statement says.

- **Letter from WCC general secretary to the United Church of Canada on the occasion of their 2009 General Conference, commending their on-going work for peace with justice in Israel-Palestine, 10 August 2009**

Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ:

Grace to you and peace in the name of the Prince of Peace. We pray for you and for the deliberations before you as the United Church of Canada commences its 2009 General Conference in Kelowna, Canada. May God grant the participants wisdom and strength, and renew your spirits daily.

We are writing at this time to share and manifest ecumenical and international support for the UCC in its on-going work for peace with justice in Israel-Palestine. This is a cause the UCC has faithfully supported. It is one in which your efforts to speak truth to power and to discern just solutions with love have inspired other member churches of the World Council of Churches.

On behalf of churches in many lands we commend to you the words of the Amman Call adopted by the World Council of Churches International Peace Conference in 2007 in Jordan. Its challenges to the whole international ecumenical communities include:

- Hearing the voices of the Christian churches of Palestine and Israel.
- Mobilizing more and more constituencies in each church to influence change toward peace with justice.
- Risking curses and abuse for standing in solidarity with Palestinian brothers and sisters of all faiths and rejecting the possibility that occupation will continue.
- Working to tear down walls and to build up bridges of reconciliation and peace between peoples in the region.
- Sharing the hope that evil and despair have been overcome through the death of our Lord on the Cross and through His Resurrection.

The Amman Call lifts up the Gospel imperative for costly solidarity in seeking peace. It challenges us to stand together in common witness and service for a just peace. With shared concern for Palestinians, Israelis and all peoples affected by this interminable conflict, we send you this sign of solidarity, of partnership and of hope.

Yours in Christ,
Rev. Dr Samuel Kobia, general secretary

- **Statement on Israeli settlements in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, adopted by the WCC central committee, Geneva, Switzerland, 26 August-2 September 2009**

While the decision of the United Nations (UN) of 1947 (Resolution 181) to establish two states in the land of Palestine was partially achieved with the creation of the state of Israel, the second part of this resolution is still waiting for realization: the establishment of a Palestinian state. The ongoing settlement policy of the state of Israel in the territories which have been occupied since 1967 is an obstacle to the fulfilment of that promise and decision of the community of nations for a viable Palestinian state. The continuous settlement of lands beyond Israel's internationally recognized borders (the 1949 Green Line borders) is almost universally rejected and met with widespread incredulity because it is illegal, unjust, incompatible with peace and antithetical to the legitimate interests of the state of Israel. Even as Israel's own right to exist in security evokes sympathy and solidarity around the world, its policies of expansion and annexation generate dismay or hostility as they represent a direct indicator of the nature of the occupation.

There are some 200 settlements with more than 450,000 settlers in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem. They make the peace efforts by the international community more vulnerable and virtually impossible. Even the "settlement freeze" requested by Israel's most important ally is met with yet another cycle of intentional delays, temporary concessions and tactical preconditions – eroding goodwill, destroying hope and pre-empting the meaningful negotiations which a good-faith freeze could facilitate. This refusal to freeze expansion further indicates a rejection of dealing with the core issue of the occupation and settlements as such.

It is heartening that the US administration and governments of many other states have expressed their determination to remove obstacles to peace and settle the Israel-Palestine conflict through negotiations that are both substantive and conclusive. This will begin a new relationship within the wider Middle East. However, it is discouraging that events in Occupied Palestinian Territory and East Jerusalem demonstrate yet again the unyielding nature of Israel's occupation and the continuous way of creating new obstacles to peace. Instead of freezing the settlement activities, work continues on large urban settlement projects and on many smaller projects. The Israeli government is still planning to build some 2,500 new housing units in East Jerusalem and the West Bank. Israel's policies cause new and repeated displacements of Palestinian citizens inside the occupied territory. The demolition of houses that took place in June 2009 in East Jerusalem created untold suffering to the Palestinians. House demolition orders against hundreds of families were delivered by Israeli municipal and military authorities and hundreds of church-owned properties are at risk, especially from the expansion of Israeli-controlled

settlements and housing in East Jerusalem. These are only isolated examples of a much larger tragedy.

The existence of these illegal settlements and their corresponding infrastructure including the separation wall, the confiscation of Palestinian lands beyond the Green Line, the so-called “security zones”, and the wide network of tunnels, by-pass roads and check points, deny Palestinians’ access to large parts of their land and water resources. They restrict their freedom of movement, diminish their basic human dignity and, in many cases, their right to life. They also have dramatic effects on the Palestinians’ right to education and access to health care system. They destroy the Palestinian economy by impeding movement of products, making the existence of a viable Palestinian state almost impossible to achieve. This increases the sense of dispossession and despair among the Palestinian population and contributes to fuel tensions in the region that will pose a great threat to the security of Israel.

The illegal settlements in and around Jerusalem endanger the future of the holy city that should be negotiated as part of a comprehensive peace agreement. The settlements isolate Jerusalem from the rest of the Palestinian West Bank, separating families and cutting economic, religious and cultural vital ties. The related Israeli policies in regards to the restriction of residency rights for the Jerusalemites through confiscation of their identity cards, limiting permits for construction of buildings and refusing family reunification, etc. are aiming at transforming the nature of the holy city that should be open to all and shared by the two peoples and the three religions.

Recalling the consistent position of World Council of Churches’ (WCC) assemblies, central committees and executive committees on this question, inter alia, rejecting any nation keeping or annexing the territory of another (Heraklion 1967, Uppsala 1968), the central committee of the WCC is:

Seized of the necessity for the High Contracting Parties to the Fourth Geneva Convention to enforce their declaration of 5 December 2001, which reaffirms the illegality of settlements and of settlement growth, and calls upon the occupying power “to fully and effectively respect the [Convention]” (Geneva 2002).

Reminded of our long-standing assessment that “unilateral actions have radically altered [Jerusalem’s] geography and demography” (Harare 1998), that United Nations Resolutions 181, 194, 303 and subsequent decisions prescribe special status for Jerusalem as a “*corpus seperatum* under a special international regime”, and that the Geneva Conventions prohibit changes in the population and character of occupied territories which include East Jerusalem.

Convinced of the need for “an international boycott of goods produced in the illegal Israeli settlements in the occupied territories and for member churches and faithful to join in non-violent acts of resistance to the destruction of Palestinian properties and to forced evictions of people from their homes and lands” (Geneva 2001).

Convinced that churches must not be complicit in illegal activities on occupied territory – including the destruction of Palestinian homes and lands and the construction of settlements, related infrastructure and the separation barrier – and have opportunities to take economic measures that are “equitable, transparent and non-violent” against these illegal activities and in support of peaceful solutions to the conflict (Geneva 2005).

Dismayed at the imposition of expanding boundaries for one side and ever smaller confinements for the other, “extending Israeli civilian and military presence inside Palestinian territory, undermining all peacemaking efforts and...the whole concept of a viable and contiguous Palestinian state” (Geneva 2004).

Reiterating that Christian holy places in Jerusalem must be “integrated and responsive to Christian communities” whose “life and roots” in Jerusalem are increasingly threatened by settlement policies there (Nairobi 1975).

Recognizing the importance of research, documentation and debate about settlements by civil society groups, faith based and international organizations, and within Israeli society, including the Israeli government’s Sassoon Report of 2005.

Reiterating the WCC call to member churches to accompany and encourage the commitment to non-violence and active engagement in peace negotiations leading towards a comprehensive and just peace in which two nations can exist side by side in security and within internationally recognized borders.

Accordingly, the central committee of the WCC, meeting in Geneva, Switzerland, 26 August – 2 September 2009, calls member churches and related organizations to:

- A. **Pray for** and **assist** people who are suffering because of the implantation of some 200 settlements in the West Bank and East Jerusalem with related roads and infrastructure, violence by settlers, military and police controls which favour settlers, and restrictions of human rights and basic livelihoods for Palestinian citizens.
- B. **Hear** the call of the churches of Jerusalem for concrete actions by the international ecumenical community toward a just peace for both Palestinians and Israelis.
- C. **Urge** both the Israeli government and the Palestinian Authority to consider their own political sovereignty on the holy land with holy sites for the three monotheistic religions and continue to involve the “Council of the Religious Institutions of the Holy Land” in the peace process and particularly regarding the status of Jerusalem and the holy sites.
- D. **Call** upon their respective governments to distinguish between the legitimate interests of the state of Israel and its illegal settlements, and to align their actions with that distinction in the interests of peace.
- E. **Monitor** and **question** governments that, on the one hand, provide Palestinians with humanitarian aid and development assistance while, on the other hand, pursuing foreign policies that allow Israel to inflict suffering on Palestinians, divide the West Bank, East Jerusalem and Gaza, maintain the blockade of Gaza, and impose various restrictions on the Palestinian economy.

The WCC central committee also:

- F. ***Calls*** upon the occupying power to fully and effectively respect the Fourth Geneva Convention, including its prohibition against changes in the population and character of occupied territories.
- G. ***Calls*** upon the government of Israel to urgently implement an open-ended freeze in good-faith on all settlement construction and expansion as a first step towards the dismantlement of all settlements.
- H. ***Invites*** member churches and faithful to give moral and practical support to non-violent acts of resistance to the confiscation of land, the destruction of Palestinian properties and the eviction of people from their homes and lands, as the central committee recommended in 2001.
- I. ***Encourages*** people on both sides of the conflict who have consistently supported the exchange of land for peace.
- J. ***Commends*** member churches, specialized ministries and church peace networks for taking part in the World Week for Peace in Palestine Israel, 4-10 June 2009, convened by the WCC and with a focus on the issue of settlements.
- K. ***Invites*** member churches that have not yet adopted the 2007 Amman Call to do so and to join with other churches working for peace as part of the Palestine Israel Ecumenical Forum.
- L. ***Reiterates*** the call for the High Contracting Parties to the Fourth Geneva Convention to enforce their declaration of 5 December 2001, which reaffirms the illegality of settlements and of settlement growth.
- M. ***Reiterates*** the need for an international boycott of settlement products and services, for member churches to inform themselves about settlement products imported into their countries and for churches to practice morally responsible investment in order to influence businesses linked to the Israeli occupation and its illegal settlements.
- N. ***Requests*** the US administration to ensure that the settlement issue is resolved as part of a comprehensive peace agreement which will include linked and sequenced steps between interim and final status measures.

- **Letter to Mr Ban Ki-moon, general secretary, United Nations regarding implementation of the Goldstone Report recommendations, 18 November 2009**

Your Excellency,
Dear Mr Secretary General,

I write this letter to convey to you our appreciation for the efforts leading to the adoption of the resolution endorsing the recommendations of the Goldstone report at the UN General Assembly in its recent session.

Your Excellency, we are of the opinion that the overwhelming support and majority votes at the General Assembly in favour of the recommendations of the Goldstone report are the expression of the will of the international community to ensure that perpetrators of war crimes and other violations of international humanitarian law should not be allowed to evade justice. We also note with satisfaction that you have called on Palestinians and Israelis immediately to begin “credible domestic investigations into the conduct of the Gaza conflict without delay.”

The World Council of Churches has been following the situation in Israel and Palestine for a long time. In a rather harsh and dismal situation, we restate our understanding that, during the Gaza War, civilians on both sides suffered and yet atrocities were significantly higher among the Palestinian population. The people of Gaza have suffered enough, and they deserve a respite in the knowledge that the perpetrators of indiscriminate violence against them will be brought to book. In this context, the World Council of Churches (WCC) believes that if the recommendations of the Goldstone report were pursued, it would send a strong message to combatants in all conflicts that nations or groups cannot act with impunity, and that there must be appropriate channels of accountability for the perpetrators of crimes in any form of conflict. The general lack of accountability for war crimes and the culture of impunity in the whole Middle East region have prevented the peace process from reaching its aims and have paved the way for increasing all kinds of extremism and indiscriminate acts of violence.

While we share the opinion that the Goldstone Commission report and its recommendations are an adequate and important source of guidance for the international community, we believe that it will also be a helpful instrument in pursuing further investigations and thus advancing justice for those who were victims of the war. There is a growing anxiety among a wide section of people in the international community who are striving to build a world rooted in peace with justice that the Goldstone Commission’s report may be impeded if some countries oppose the report at the level of the Security Council, or that there could be a resolution that dilutes the intent and scope of the Goldstone report. It is for this reason that we urge Your Excellency to initiate such steps as may create a platform where, through dialogue, both Israel and Hamas will unconditionally concede the need for complete and credible investigations into their actions during the war. Such consensus becomes urgent at a time when the entire international community is looking for a just reconciliation and peace in the Middle East. In this context, the need of the hour is an unequivocal affirmation of the highest principles of justice, human rights and humanitarian practices which will ensure the aspirations of the people to live in peace with justice and dignity.

Your Excellency, the World Council of Churches has long held the position that durable peace, reconciliation and healing between Palestinians and Israelis should be based on justice. We now urge you to use your good offices to ensure that the United Nations acts as the guarantor of the protection of human rights and justice in Palestine and Israel through firm and decisive action.

Yours Sincerely,
Rev. Dr Samuel Kobia
General secretary

- **Statement by WCC general secretary on Israel's approval of 900 more housing units in Gilo settlement, 19 November 2009**

It is with great disappointment that the World Council of Churches (WCC) heard the news that the government of Israel has approved construction of 900 more housing units in the settlement of Gilo near East Jerusalem. The WCC strongly condemns the decision of the government of Israel to expand the illegal Gilo settlement as we believe that this decision will hinder attempts now in process to restart the peace negotiations.

The decision by the Israel government has shocked and dismayed many in the international community. This is evident in reactions from around the world deploring the decision to expand settlements on Palestinian territories. In fact, this decision to expand settlements is a violation of international law like the many before it. Gilo is built on Palestinian territory occupied by Israel in the 1967 war. Any expansion of settlements perpetuates illegality. At a time when Palestinians – many of them impoverished – are routinely denied legitimate applications to build homes on their own land, the decision to approve construction of 900 new four- and five-bedroom housing units that will bring relatively affluent Israelis to occupied land is deplorable.

The WCC central committee recently stated that “the continuous settlement of lands beyond Israel’s internationally recognized borders (the 1949 Green Line borders) is almost universally rejected and met with widespread incredulity because it is illegal, unjust, and incompatible with peace and antithetical to the legitimate interests of the state of Israel.” The central committee meeting in September 2009 further noted that “if settlements continue to expand and proliferate, they will further complicate negotiations and may destroy any chance for peace”.

The WCC restates our long-held view that, in addition to their illegality, settlements defy the whole concept of a viable and contiguous Palestinian state. Our considered opinion is that the Israeli government can choose to

act in a manner consistent with international law or continue to violate the rights of its Palestinian neighbours, demolish their homes, disregard international public opinion and suffer the consequences in its relationships. People of conscience and good faith around the world are looking to the government of Israel now to move toward the resolution of an interminable conflict rather than continue with decades-old policies that have driven it toward the point no return.

The WCC asks its member churches, ecumenical partners, specialised ministries and agencies to act with resolve, and in concert, to mobilize their members and the public to reverse this decision of the Israeli government and the settlement program it represents.

Rev. Dr Samuel Kobia
General secretary
World Council of Churches

Syria

- **Letter from WCC general secretary to H.E. Dr Bashar al-Asad, president of the Syrian Arab Republic, underlining the WCC's support for the steps the Syrian Government has taken in promoting inter-faith dialogue and in providing a safe haven for Iraqi, Palestinian and other refugees, 23 May 2008**

Your Excellency,

Greetings from the World Council of Churches.

With this letter I convey our profound thanks for the very warm reception that you accorded our delegation when we visited you in your palace in Damascus last month. Thank you also for giving us sufficient time to bring up a number of issues for discussion.

Our delegation was very much impressed by the distinctive Syrian example of the harmonious living dialogue between Christians and Muslims. We were equally impressed by the hospitality that your Government and the Syrian people have extended to Palestinian and Iraqi refugees, and above all by your wise leadership to the country and its religious diversity that maintains the Christian presence in the cradle of Christianity.

We felt privileged that you confided in us that Syria and Israel had decided to resume peace talks through the mediation of Turkey, and we highly appreciate your vision for a just and comprehensive peace in the region. It is hugely encouraging to learn that now the talks have started in earnest. We wish to assure you of our prayers for a successful outcome of the talks.

Throughout the meetings the delegation had with Your Excellency as well as with Christian and Muslim leaders we heard the same message: Better understanding between religions can only be achieved if Christians and Muslims see each other as human beings rather than as representatives of one faith group.

We support you and join you in addressing the concern of how to help other countries to have the same multi-coloured face as Syria has. We highly recognize your efforts and

those of the Syrian Government in providing a safe haven for Iraqi, Palestinian and other refugees. We particularly appreciate your decision to open Syrian public schools to Iraqi children, a step that reflects your insightful vision by focusing on education to confront ignorance, closed-mindedness and extremism. And we at the World Council of Churches hope that under your leadership the Syrian Government will continue to support the Iraqi families, especially those who need to renew their permanent stay in the country, and that their children will be able to attend Syrian schools. We count on your support to continue providing a safe haven for these families in Syria until they find a permanent solution. For our part as World Council of Churches, we shall advocate for the Iraqi refugees with the international community and our member churches in different countries.

I am very happy to share with you our policy document on the Middle East that includes statements and positions taken by the World Council of Churches on the issue of just peace in the Middle East, and on migration.

Before concluding this letter, allow me to reiterate my invitation to Your Excellency to visit the World Council of Churches and address us, especially on the prospects for a just peace in the Middle East and the role of religious leaders. It will be a great honour to receive you at the Ecumenical Centre here in Geneva at your convenience.

With best wishes,

Sincerely yours,
Rev. Dr Samuel Kobia
General secretary

NORTH AMERICA

United States of America

- **Participation of the WCC United Nations Liaison Office in the fifth annual Ecumenical Advocacy Days, Washington D.C., USA, 9-12 March 2007**

Children the focus of this year's Ecumenical Advocacy Days in Washington

Nearly 1,300 religious advocates are expected for this year's Ecumenical Advocacy Days taking place 9-12 March in Washington, DC on the theme, "... and how are the children?"

The World Council of Churches (WCC) is one of nearly 50 religious groups and a wide array of Christian denominations sponsoring this fifth annual gathering of social justice advocates from around the US.

Focusing on issues affecting children, the 2007 theme will guide workshops and speakers in eight different areas of concern: Africa, Asia-Pacific, Latin America, Middle East, domestic, jubilee and economic justice, eco-justice, and global security.

Experts will train participants on how to do advocacy, and inform them of US domestic and international policies that impact all of God's children. The gathering will conclude with a visit to Capitol Hill, where participants will ask their congressional representatives to make the needs of children the centre of the 2007 legislative agenda.

Ecumenical Advocacy Days coordinator Michael Neuroth says his hope for this year's edition is "that it will strengthen the ecumenical movement through a process of raising the voices of the US Christians on the ways their country's policy impact the plight of children around the world".

The initiative's mission statement characterizes it as "a movement of the ecumenical Christian community, and its recognized partners and allies, grounded in biblical witness and our shared traditions of justice, peace and the integrity of creation".

The WCC has participated in this annual event since 2004 through its New York-based UN liaison office and through the US Conference for the WCC.

- **Statement by WCC general secretary regarding the killings at Virginia Tech University, 16 April 2007**

I would like to express my deep sorrow for the 33 people who have been shot at the Virginia Tech University yesterday. Like many people, my heart went out to them when I heard this dreadful news. I pray that God will keep and comfort the bereaved as they mourn the loss of loved ones and of people so young. Our prayers go also to the 29 wounded for speedy and full recovery.

Churches around the world join churches and councils of churches in the US in sending sympathies to those who are suffering, and in upholding parishes in Virginia in their ministry during these difficult days. As we do so, we also wonder in disbelief at this new horror of random violence. In deference to those who have died and with concern for the future, we all must ask why such killings happen so easily. Why are these incidents repeated as if there are no remedies? How can anyone accept such failures in a society with so much to offer for the well-being of its citizens?

Today and in the days to come, national leaders, state leaders and the gun lobby across the USA must hear more than the latest outburst of anger at violence in America. They must also begin to understand the rising frustration among concerned citizens and governments around the world.

The World Council of Churches has 347 member churches in over 100 countries. For many of them the news from Virginia today is little different than the news from Darfur yesterday and the news from Iraq tomorrow. They see wanton killings, the indiscriminate use of armed force and the widespread availability of deadly weapons.

Churches around the world have also noticed something behind such news. They understand that one of the major obstacles to effective global regulation of small arms and light weapons is the pro-gun position adopted by the US administration during years of international negotiations. There are other factors involved, but US arms manufacturing and arms sales policies have violent consequences abroad as well as in the US.

We are all Virginians in our sympathy, but many people around the world are also Virginians in their vulnerability to the misuse of unregulated guns. Each day, about 1,000 of them die from gun violence and many more are injured.

The globalized trade in small arms and light weapons must come under firm and appropriate controls. Much greater accountability by local, national and international authorities is necessary. Virginia is only the latest of many violent incidents that require an urgent national and international response.

Rev. Dr Samuel Kobia
General secretary
World Council of Churches

- **Summary of “Living Letters” ecumenical team visit to the United States, 14-24 September 2007**

- The Living Letters team was encouraged by the people of Salam Arabic Lutheran Church to make their church a place of welcome for people of all faiths. This “living” model of interreligious harmony has greatly accomplished peaceful coexistence. It can be learnt and used by others to promote good relations among members of different faiths.
- The churches through the leadership of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the USA were opposed to the war in Iraq.
- The Living Letters team visited Nickel Mines Amish community whose story of forgiveness provides a practical lesson for all Christians

It was six years after “September 11” and two years after Hurricane Katrina when Living Letters visited the USA. The attack which is commonly remembered as 9/11 and the Natural disaster (Katrina) left hundreds dead or gravely affected. The terrorist attack ushered in an era of aggressive military actions on what the then USA administration called “war on terror.” The war has left many affected around the world.

Living letters visited the USA in September 2007. They observed that apart from terrorism, people are faced with many other challenges. At the time of the visit, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania had the highest homicide rate of cities in the USA. Despite the odds, the team noted valuable roles that churches and their communities play to intervene especially towards a just and peaceful society.

Excerpts from Living Letters U.S. report

We were deeply impressed by the faithful commitment of Rev. Khader El-Yateem and the people of Salam Arabic Lutheran Church (www.arabicbible.com/salam/) in Brooklyn, New York whose decision to make their church home a place of welcome and a safe space for people of different faiths to find common ground, has enabled a whole community to live in peace against all odds. Because of this faithful commitment to the Gospel’s call to love one another, Muslim, Christian and Jewish neighbours had already come to know and trust each other before the crisis of 9/11 threatened to irreparably tear the fabric of interfaith tolerance in this Brooklyn neighbourhood. On that terrible day – because of the relationships already established over time between religious and civic leaders through meetings hosted by Salam Arabic Lutheran Church – the church became a literal sanctuary for a community fearing for its well-being and braced for retaliatory violence. On the day that the Living Letters delegation visited Salam Arabic Lutheran Church, it was very evident that Muslim and Christian leaders alike, gathered in that place to greet us were mutually committed to overcoming violence and setting an example of respect and peaceful coexistence.

In a discussion of the Iraq War, the faithful commitment of the leadership of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the USA was seen to be a key influence in rallying

the churches and other faith communities in first opposing the war in Iraq, and then in speaking out against the war – despite the fact that originally nearly fifty percent of those in the pews of the NCCCUSA’s member churches supported the current Administration in invading and occupying Iraq. Ultimately, the NCCCUSA’s faithful commitment to advocacy and education and in helping bear witness to the position of the churches in the Middle East in opposing the war has helped to shift the balance so that the majority of those in the pews and in society now oppose the Administrations’ policies on Iraq.

Living Letters met with the members of the Amish community who in 1996 made world headline because of their acts of faith. In the fall of 2006 gunman shot 10 girls aged 6-13 in the West Nickel Mines Amish School. Five of them died while the others sustained serious injuries. To date one of them is still semi-comatose. Also dead was the gunman who committed suicide after the gruesome act. The parents of the victims forgave the gunman. During his funeral, moaners of the Amish community outnumbered the family members of the murderer and even went to comfort the family. Forgiveness and other core teachings of Jesus which all lead to Just-Peace connect with the IEPC. The IEPC is an arena not only to celebrate but to remind each other about the core message of Christ. The story of forgiveness by the Amish community who live upon and practice Christ’s teachings would be a practical teaching to share with others at IEPC.

- **Open letter by Rev. Dr Bernice Powell Jackson, WCC president from North America and moderator of the US Conference for the WCC to the peoples of the US Gulf Coast in the wake of Hurricane Gustav, 2 September 2008**

To our brothers and sisters of the U.S. Gulf Coast,

The US Conference of the World Council of Churches sends you the love and prayers of your brothers and sister in Christ across the country and around the world. We join the many who have expressed concern for your well-being and who are holding you constantly in prayer. Know that we will continue to walk with you in your time of trouble, to help wipe away your tears and help you re-build your communities. We know that we can do all things in Christ, who strengthens us.

This is our prayer:

Great and Awesome God, we thank you for your presence with the people of the Gulf Coast during this difficult moment.

We thank you for the safe evacuation of millions of your people. We ask now that you surround them with your comfort, with your strength and most of all, with your love.

Place your hand of protection over all the rescue workers, over every national guardsperson, police officer and sheriff. Bless those who continue to work, to care for

the sick and vulnerable. Bless those who are providing shelter, who are feeding and housing the evacuees.

We pray for every city and town and every home in the path of the storm. Loving God, we ask that you touch all those who are not only living through another evacuation, but who are struggling with the memories of the last three years. Bless them in a very special way.

We pray for the continued re-building of the churches, the communities and the people of the entire Gulf Coast. This is our prayer, which we pray in the name of Jesus Christ.

- **Letter from WCC general secretary to US President-elect, Mr Barack Obama congratulating him on his election victory and expressing the full support of the WCC in his new role, 5 November 2008**

Dear President-Elect Obama,

May the God of love and peace bless you today and in the days ahead.

I write on behalf of the World Council of Churches, its 349 Christian communions and their combined membership of more than 560 million members, to offer our heartfelt congratulations on your election to the presidency of the United States. Our prayers are with you and your entire family. This is a day of new beginnings and boundless possibilities.

Please know that we grieve with you and your family over the recent death of your grandmother. May your faith in Jesus Christ and his assurance of the resurrection to eternal life comfort you in this hour. We are grateful to God for the life of this woman who was instrumental in shaping the person you have become – a leader not only in the United States, but in the hopes and dreams of so many people across the globe. Many look with expectation for you to guide your nation toward justice and reconciliation, and also for you to provide wise guidance in your country's relations with other nations. The rest of the world, just like the USA, needs change and will expect you to contribute to that change we all can believe in.

As the American orator Frederick Douglass said, "If there is no struggle, there is no progress." The world has watched your struggle. It is apparent that the world is prepared to stand and struggle with you, so long as you and your team are committed to take along the "least of these" on your liberating journey. The really hard part is just beginning, but do remember that our minds and hearts are with you.

We would welcome the opportunity to sit down and visit with you once you have settled into your new position, or even before. Let us know a good time for a visit from Geneva.

Of course, a visit from you to Geneva would be most welcome as well. We are anxious to hear your advice for the world's churches and their members.

With unceasing prayer in the Holy Spirit for the grace to sustain your great calling,

I respectfully remain,
Rev. Dr Samuel Kobia general secretary
and pastor of the Methodist Church in Kenya

- **Letter from WCC general secretary to Archbishop Vicken Aykazian, legate of the Diocese of the Armenian Church of America (Eastern) and president of the NCCUSA congratulating him on receiving the Ellis Island Medal of Honour, 15 May 2009**

Your Eminence, dear Archbishop Vicken,

Christ is risen!

In this joyful Easter season, we were even more delighted to learn that you were awarded the Ellis Island Medal of Honour, a distinction recognizing the contribution of ethnic groups to America's diversity.

We are very proud indeed that this recognition is attributed to a member of the Central and executive committees of the World Council of Churches, a hierarch of the Supreme Catholicosate of all Armenians in Etchmiadzin known for his long-standing and genuine commitment to the ecumenical movement as a whole, a friend and companion for many years in our long and sometimes difficult journey towards unity and reconciliation.

Our most sincere congratulations! This is recognition of your personal commitment to the ideals of pluralism and democracy in the society, peace and reconciliation among peoples, churches' unity and common witness. At the same time, it is a great honour to your people and to your church, the Armenian Orthodox Church, known for her readiness to be one of the most constructive elements in all societies that have hosted her people, dispersed around the world as a consequence of her painful history including the tragic experience of genocide.

May God bless your ministry!

In friendship,
Rev. Dr Samuel Kobia
General secretary of the World Council of Churches

- **Letter to the US President Barack Obama on receiving the Nobel Peace Prize, 10 October 2009**

Dear Mr President,

It is with great joy that I take this opportunity to express my profound satisfaction at the decision of the Norwegian Nobel Committee to award you this year's Nobel Peace Prize. Rev. Dr Olav Fykse Tveit, the general secretary-elect of the World Council of Churches, who will succeed me in January 2010, joins in offering you our heartfelt congratulations on receiving the Nobel Peace Prize. As citizens of Norway and Kenya, we take pride in our two nations' particular connections to this event.

The Nobel committee's decision honours you as a statesman who demonstrates a deep commitment to the cause of peace with justice, and hope for a transformation in this world. This quality of yours was eloquently recognized by the Nobel committee when it stated that only very rarely has a person captured the world's attention to the extent that you have done already, and given the world's people hope for a better future.

You have shown the world your readiness to set aside serious ideological, political and cultural differences in the pursuit of peace and reconciliation. I am confident that this approach will ensure positive new developments in international relations and diplomacy. Your endorsement of the United Nations resolution on nuclear non-proliferation, your decision to discard U.S. plans to build a missile shield for Eastern Europe, your call to curb greenhouse gas emissions to prevent global warming and your eagerness for easing conflicts with Islamic nations demonstrate your deep commitment to promote peace and reconciliation in today's troubled world. In all these matters, your administration affirms long-held positions of the World Council of Churches.

Your initiatives for promoting a new ethos and values in international relations based on a diplomacy of mutual recognition and shared responsibilities are vital in our contemporary situation. I am confident that the decision of the Nobel committee to confer this year's peace prize upon you will go a long way toward accelerating your relentless efforts to contribute to peace. The award is a call and encouragement to build upon the important work you have already initiated.

As you continue to demonstrate your leadership, may God Almighty continue to bless you. On behalf of the World Council of Churches, I assure you of our continuing prayers and support.

Yours sincerely,
Rev. Dr Samuel Kobia
General secretary

CCIA MEMBERSHIP

Mr Roel Aalbersberg
Mrs Justina Yuo Dze Abeng
Mr Joyanta Adhikari

Bishop Niels Henrik Arendt
Rev. Dick Avi
Rev. Kjell Magne Bondevik
Prof. Dr Sooil Chai
Dr Berhé Tesfu Costantinos
Rev. Didier Crouzet
Bishop Duleep Kamil De Chickera
Rev. Shirley Elaine DeWolf
Mrs Noemi Espinoza
Rev. Noel Osvaldo Fernández
Ms Kathryn Fournier

Rev. Cornelia Füllkrug-Weitzel
Ms Tsovinar Ghazaryan

Ms Sepiuta Hala'api'api

Most Rev. Dr Josiah Atkins Idowu-Fearon
Rev. Dr Carlos Intipampa Aliaga
Rev. Dr Yawo Senyéebia Kakpo
Mr Thomas Hyeono Kang
Ms Karimi Kinoti
Mrs Vanna Kitsinian
Mr Masimba Lovemore Kuchera
Prof. Dr Vladimir R. Legoyda

Ms Mae Maureen Malecdan
Ms Lina Moukheiber
Mr Lukasz Nazarko
Rev. Elenie Poulos
Dr Audeh B. Quawas
Rev. Dr Dan Sandu
Mr André Francious September
Rev. Dr Andrea Zaki Stephanous

Mr Jonathan R. Ulanday
Dr Emily Welty
H.G. Bishop Youannes
Rev Dr Tony Richie
Rev. Dr T. DeWitt Smith Jr.

ICCO & Kerk in Actie
Presbyterian Church in Cameroon
Christian Commission for Development in Bangladesh
Danish Lutheran Church
United Church in Papua New Guinea
The Oslo Center for Peace and Human Rights
Hanshin University
Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church
Eglise Réformée de France
Anglican Church
Africa University
Reformed Church in Honduras
Ecumenical Disability Advocates Network
Aboriginal Affairs & Northern Development Canada
Diakonisches Werk der EKD
Armenian Apostolic Church (Mother See of Holy Etchmiadzin)
Anglican Church in Aotearoa, New Zealand and Polynesia
Church of Nigeria (Anglican Communion)
Iglesia Evangélica Metodista en Bolivia
Eglise évangélique presbytérienne du Togo
Fundação de Economia e Estatística
Christian Aid – Kenya
Armenian Apostolic Church (Holy See of Cilicia)
Students Solidarity Trust
Moscow State University of International Relations
National Council of Churches in the Philippines
Saint George Hospital
Polish Autocephalous Orthodox Church
Uniting Church in Australia
Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Jerusalem
Romanian Orthodox Church
United Congregational Church of Southern Africa
Coptic Evangelical Organization for Social Services
United Methodist Church
Presbyterian Church (USA)
Coptic Orthodox Church
Church of God
Trinity Baptist Church of Metro Atlanta

CCIA STAFF

GENEVA AND NEW YORK (BETWEEN 2007 AND 2009)

GENEVA

Mr Clement John, Church of Pakistan

*Programme executive, Asia & Pacific, Human Rights & Religious Freedom
Acting CCIA Director (retired in March 2007)*

Rev. Elenora Giddings-Ivory, Presbyterian Church, USA

CCIA director (November 2007 – June 2009)

Dr Mathews George Chunakara, Mar Thoma Syrian Church, India

*Programme executive for Asia and Human Rights (to June 2009)
CCIA Director (from July 2009)*

Rev. Ian W. Alexander, Church of Scotland

*Ecumenical Accompaniment Programme in Palestine & Israel (EAPPI)
Consultant (September 2007 – December 2008)*

Ms Rima Barsoum, Syrian Orthodox Patriarchate of Antioch and All the East

Programme executive, Christian Muslim Relations (from October 2007)

Mr Jonathan Frerichs, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, USA

Programme executive, Middle East & Nuclear Peacemaking (from September 2007)

Rev. Hansulrich Gerber, Swiss Mennonite Church

Programme executive, Decade to Overcome Violence (to October 2009)

Mr Rifat Kassis, Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and the Holy Land

*Ecumenical Accompaniment Programme in Palestine & Israel (EAPPI)
International Co-ordinator (to September 2007)*

Dr Guillermo Kerber, Roman Catholic Church, Uruguay

*Programme executive, Latin America & Caribbean, Impunity, Justice & Reconciliation
(to July 2009)*

Dr Rogate Mshana, Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania

Programme Executive for Economic Justice (to June 2009)

Dr Geiko Müller-Fahrenholz, Evangelical Church in Germany

Consultant, International Ecumenical Peace Convocation (IEPC) (to February 2008)

Mr Michel Nseir, Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Antioch and All the East, Lebanon

Programme executive, Special Focus on the Middle East (from September 2007)

Ms Christina Papazoglou, Ecumenical Patriarchate, Greece
Programme executive, Human Rights (from December 2007)

Rev. Dr Shanta Premawardhana, Alliance of Baptists, Sri Lanka
Director, Interreligious Dialogue and Cooperation (P6) (from December 2007)

Mr Manuel Quintero Perez
Coordinator (Consultant), Ecumenical Accompaniment Programme in Palestine & Israel (EAPPI) (from August 2009)

Rev. Dr Hielke Wolters, Protestant Church in the Netherlands
Director, Justice, Diakonia and Responsibility for Creation (P4) (August 2007 – June 2009)

Ms Semegnish Asfaw
Research associate, International Ecumenical Peace Convocation (IEPC)

Ms Nan Braunschweiger
Co-ordinator, International Ecumenical Peace Convocation (IEPC) (from September 2008)

Ms Anne-Marie Vuignier-James
EAPPI Programme associate

Ms Wenona Arndt
Ms Patricia Bruschweiler
Ms Diana Chabloz (to March 2009)
Ms Sophie Dhanjal (to June 2009)
Ms Greta Hovda (from June 2009)
Ms Beatrice Merahi
Ms Suzanne Michellod-Tomaiuolo (October 2007 – September 2009)
Ms Yvette Milosevic (to June 2010)
Ms Alexandra Pomezny
Ms Jenny Roske (to March 2008)
Ms Marietta Ruhland (from July 2007)
Project Assistants

Ms Jane Leeke, Canada (to February 2007)
Mr Karim-Antoine Megarbane, Lebanon (May – July 2008)
Ms Hotavia Gingerlei Porter, American Samoa (January 2008 – January 2009)
Ms Angela Schnepel, Germany (March – July 2009)
Interns

NEW YORK
Rev. Christopher Ferguson, United Church of Canada
Representative to the United Nations in New York

Mr John Asher (March 2008 – October 2009)
Programme assistant and office administrator

Ms Catherine Bordeau (to December 2008)
Ms Elizabeth Chun Hye Lee (from September 2008)
Programme associates and office Administrators

Mr David Fraccaro (October 2007 – December 2008)
Young Adult EF coordinator

Mr Nam Duk Hwang (September 2007 – August 2008)
Intern

ABBREVIATIONS

AACC	All Africa Council of Churches
ACT	Action by Churches Together (ACT) is a global alliance of churches of the World Council of Churches and the Lutheran World Federation and their related aid agencies working to save lives and support communities during emergencies
BWA	Baptist World Alliance
CCA	Christian Conference of Asia
CCC	Caribbean Conference of Churches
CCEE	Council of European Bishops Conferences
CCIA	Commission of the Churches on International Affairs of the World Council of Churches
CEC	Conference of European Churches
CLAI	Latin American Council of Churches
CWC	Christian World Communion
CWM	Council for World Mission
CWS	Church World Service
DOV	Decade to Overcome Violence
EAPPI	Ecumenical Accompaniment Programme in Palestine and Israel
ECOSOC	UN Economic and Social Council
FfD	Financing for Development
IEO	International Ecumenical Organization
IPCC	Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change
LWF	Lutheran World Federation
MECC	Middle East Council of Churches
NCCCUSA	National Council of the Churches of Christ in the USA
NCCI	National Council of Churches in India
NCCK	National Council of Churches in Korea
NCCP	National Council of Churches in the Philippines
NFWZ	Nuclear Free Weapons Zone
PCC	Pacific Conference of Churches
REO	Regional Ecumenical Organization
UCCSA	United Congregational Church of Southern Africa
WARC	World Alliance of Reformed Churches
WMC	World Methodist Council
WSCF	World Student Christian Federation