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REPORT OF THE GENERAL SECRETARY TO THE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

1. Introduction

We are living in a time when the purpose and the objectives of the World Council of Churches are of the highest relevance. The many expressions of polarization, greater gaps between rich and poor, extremism and violence, worries about the future of the planet Earth and withdrawal of accountability for our common home and future create a constant challenge to we stand for, what we can do, and what our values and vision are. This comes to the surface in the efforts to pursue a Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace. There are so many contexts, so many people who long and struggle for more justice, for reconciliation and peace that can bring new light and new hope into their lives. Concluding this report in Jerusalem at Pentecost, invited by HB Patriarch Theophilus III, after celebrating at the empty tomb at the Holy Sepulchre, praying for the Holy Spirit to come again and again to bring unity and just peace, I think I could see even more clearly the basis and calling we have as a fellowship of churches.

The WCC has been involved in this longing and these struggles, through prayers and hard work, for almost 70 years. At April 24 this year HAH Bartholomew I, the Ecumenical Patriarch, visited the Ecumenical Centre and reminded us in his public speech of the legacy pursued by his predecessors since 1920: the call for a council of churches to work for the visible unity of the church. He showed the clear connection between the quest for unity of the church and the initiatives to serve the unity in the one world crated by God, to care for peace, justice and the environment. In these last months I have been representing the legacy of the WCC together with many of you and with our colleagues in places where we are called to be together on a Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace in our world. This belongs to the identity of the church. Already in Uppsala in 1968, the WCC said that “catholicity is the opposite of all kinds of egoism and particularism” (“The Holy Spirit and the Catholicity of the Church,” N. Goodall, ed., *The Uppsala 68 Report*, Geneva, WCC, 13).

Therefore, based on the historical realities in which we live, I believe that there is a need for a new “search for unity.” In my report to the executive committee this time, I will discuss how the WCC contributes through many dimensions of our work to the *unity* of the church, and how the unity we are able to express contributes to the unity of humankind. (I will in this report not give an extensive account of visits and meetings, nor the highlights of the programme work, as this is already reported through our website, in the attached overview of visits and meetings, and through other reports to the Executive Committee.)

2. Our call to unity yesterday and today

We are approaching the 70th anniversary of the WCC, and we shall discuss our plans for this important dimension to what we do in 2018. Through the entire history of the WCC, there has been a commitment to work for both the unity of the church and the common service and witness for justice and peace in the world. Even long before the WCC was established, pioneers of the ecumenical movement established the “World Alliance for Promoting International Friendship through the Churches.” We have also had different challenges in combining the two dimensions of the WCC’s purpose and identity. We can learn a lot from different attempts to bring these two dimensions of our calling together. In our mid-term evaluation and reflection on our strategic objectives I think we will see that a lot of these concerns and objectives (to combine the two objectives) are still operative in our organization and our fellowship. Most important now is that we develop our theological reflection and our plans so that we make this an even stronger combination.

With regard to our call to unity, I see the picture of a landscape that can be interpreted at least in two different ways. There is, from one perspective, a critical moment in the ecumenical movement as there are polarizing factors and anti-ecumenical dynamics in many of our churches and beyond. There is a struggle about the “soul of Christianity”: Shall we be protective or even exclusive as an alternative to searching to embrace the diversity given by God, pursuing ecumenical openness and common initiatives? Another dominating perspective is that there is a stronger momentum for moving together, as pilgrims working and praying together for the values of justice and peace as signs of the kingdom of God present among us. This is not an alternative between being open to the gospel or the tradition of the church, but rather how we understand the gospel as the basis and corrective to how we interpret and live in our respective traditions today. There is a willingness in the WCC constituencies and beyond, in the Roman Catholic Church, in the World Evangelical Alliance, among Pentecostal churches and others, to seek a united witness and a common service, to unite our agendas and resources for those who need our joint attention and support the most.

Dear sisters and brothers, this is the landscape that we are moving in together, also as we start moving towards the 11th Assembly of the World Council of Churches, in 2021. How are we expressing our response to the call to unity in many different ways in our time, and particularly in ways that the next generations will see as their way – a way of dignity, joy, creativity, openness, humility, courage, and hope?

“God unites, the enemy divides.” This was the title of one of the speeches (of the bishop of Oslo, Eivind Berggrav) at the first Assembly of the WCC in Amsterdam, August 1948. The speech described how the work for unity belongs to the characteristics of God. The dividing powers of the two world wars were again visible in new divides and an iron curtain. We should not focus on who are our enemies, I think, but we should pay attention to the forces that make people enemies to one another. We have to analyze how the polarizing and dividing powers that lead to conflict and war today are working against the will of God in this world.

In a Faith and Order study on the unity of the church and the unity of humankind” (Faith and Order, “Unity of the Church – Unity of Mankind (1973)”, in G. Gassmann (ed.) *Documentary History of Faith and Order 1963-1993*. Geneva, WCC, 137-143), one of the clear conclusions was that the unity of the church is a sign and foretaste of the unity of humankind. In another of the significant joint studies between more departments in the WCC in the 1990s, focusing on the connections between unity, justice and peace, the concept of “costly unity” was developed (“Costly Unity”, in T.F. Best and W. Granberg-Michaelson (eds), *Costly Unity*, Geneva, WCC, 1993, 83-104). The call to unity is the basis for all that we do, and we have to remind ourselves again and again what that calling implies in terms of commitment to really overcome our historical division, and to work for a unity that represents both

justice and peace. This is not an exercise at the surface of the matters, it goes deep into our lives and priorities. It has a price; it is costly—if we are serious.

This was a very tough lesson to be learned in the Programme to Combat Racism. The struggle against racism became also a battle within and between the churches. The racial division of human beings created in the image of God, divided also in the church. This is a reality of exclusion and division that is not over, and we have to be aware of how it plays out also today. Not only in the matter of race, but also in issues of gender, sexual orientation, et cetera, we have to be aware of how these are complicated issues to deal with. As the WCC we have been addressing racism again in different ways. We have established a reference group on Human Sexuality that provides a space for the challenging conversation about how the churches deal with the many issues related to human sexuality, and how they also affect the quest for unity.

In the unity statement from the 10th Assembly in Busan we concluded that the unity of the church and the unity of humankind are interconnected.

“The unity of the Church, the unity of the human community and the unity of the whole creation are interconnected. Christ who makes us one calls us to live in justice and peace and impels us to work together for justice and peace in God’s world. The plan of God made known to us in Christ is, in the fullness of time, to gather up all things in Christ, “things in heaven and things on earth (Ephesians 1:9-10).” (“God’s Gift and Call to Unity – And our Commitment,” Unity Statement adopted by the WCC 10th Assembly on 8 November 2013).

One of the conflicts in our world relates in a special way to both our search for unity as reconciliation and just peace, as well as our theological reflection on unity in faith and in solidarity with one another as churches. These days we remember the war in June 1967 that has led to 50 years of occupation of the land of the Palestinians. We have as the WCC been constantly working for justice and peace in Israel and Palestine. As was noted already in 1948, “...the churches are in duty bound to pray and work for an order in Palestine as just as may be in the midst of our human disorder” (W. A. Visser ‘t Hooft (ed.), *The First Assembly of the World Council of Churches*. London, SCM Press, 1949, 163). We continue to do so with different initiatives, and we will continue also in this meeting to discuss how we shall do this work together. There is no way to defend this occupation, which has developed more and more into colonization of an area outside the internationally recognized borders of Israel. To let this occupation continue like this, shows a fundamental lack of understanding of what it means to be the neighbour to others, a lack of will to understand what it means to be in the shoes of the occupied, and a lack of courage to take the consequences of this as a serious moral problem by those who accept the situation.

What is at stake is our commitment to basic values that can come from a deeper understanding of God’s call to unity for humankind; a call to unity in diversity but in just peace, not only within and for one group, one people, or one religion, but for all. We have to continue to work and pray that faith in one God will bring another type of relations of justice and peace, one day. This day should come soon, before it is too late.

I have tried to raise this theme - how God is calling us to unity as church and as humanity - in several other contexts in the last several months, as well. In a visit to Harare, organized by the Zimbabwe Council of Churches almost 20 years after the 8th Assembly, I was asked to preach at an ecumenical prayer service in the cathedral. I will always remember from that service the diverse and united expressions of the joy of being together in song, prayer and dance, particularly through the women’s choirs from different churches. The unity we seek is a unity in joy and celebration, where all can participate, not only something we make statements about or have as a theme for our discussions.

We have to take it into our minds, into our hearts, into our hands: we are called to be one, so that the world may believe that Jesus Christ is sent from the One God. We are called to give witness to this revelation of the love of God in this world, so that the world may believe in God's future. So that the world may have hope. We must search for unity in faith, hope and love. In my sermon in Harare I reflected on how the call to seek what is "above", as we read in Col 3:1ff, is to seek all the attitudes and characteristics of Christ that work for unity. This is what corresponds to the will of God in creation and in salvation, to unite everything in Christ. We are created to be one, we are saved through Christ to be one. This is the deeper meaning of the efforts of our ecumenical organizations and instruments.

The significance of renewing the role of the council of churches in Zimbabwe is an urgent task in a nation deeply divided and with severe problems related to governance and the economy of the country. The conversations with church leaders and with the political leaders showed the need for the churches to contribute to unity, through their own expressions of unity based on justice and peace.

Another perspective of the theological dimension to our quest for unity is expressed in the famous reflections of St Paul in 1 Cor: 12-14 on the unity of the body of Christ. The connection between the ecumenical challenge and problem and the ecumenical response and solution is described as "the better way" of love. The ecumenical endeavours cannot be successful without a deep understanding of what it means to live together in the body of Christ, in the love of Christ. This gives us a dimension to fellowship and unity that might appear as obvious, but from experience we also know that this is the key to all efforts to overcome divisions and conflicts. As there is a need to clarify the dividing questions in the church, whether they are theological or practical, there is no way to separate the dialogue of truth and the dialogue of love. They are in all our efforts interrelated. This approach to unity is of course one of the corner stones also in the connection between the efforts for unity of the church and unity of the world. It has to be seen as an expression of the love of God, which is given to us in Christ, to be shared in our fellowship of the church, and in our efforts to unite the broken world.

In the significant move toward more visible unity expressed in the joint commemoration of 500 years of Reformation, as they are pursued for example in Lund last year and in a joint prayer of confession and reconciliation in Hildesheim, Germany, in March (where I was invited to give greetings on behalf of the WCC), there have been clear connections between the dialogue of truth and the dialogue of love. The way "from conflict to communion" has been described and pursued, even if there are significant unsolved issues between Lutheran churches (and other churches of the Reformation) and the Roman Catholic Church. The Reformation anniversary has offered new opportunities to emphasize what the churches have in common and what has been wrong on both sides.

The expressions of communion are particularly defined through the commitments to common service and witness, as pilgrims seeking the way forward together and not remaining where we are, waiting for everything and all to be settled, but moving and praying that God will lead us to more unity as we move forward. This was the tone in the commemoration events in Lund, and I have heard this language in other contexts as well. Here the emphasis has been on God's grace as the basis for all unity in the church, and the expectation that God will lead the churches into more unity.

Another context where the question of unity has raised new theological reflections on what our faith in God, in one God, means, is in the efforts to address interfaith initiatives for peace, coexistence and unity. One of these significant events in the last months was the international peace conference in Cairo in April – following a round of dialogue between Al Azhar, the Muslim Council of Elders, and the WCC. The Ecumenical Patriarch, HAH Bartholomew, the GS of the NCCCUSA, Mr Jim Winkler, and other church leaders participated in this significant event as well. In my statement at the opening of the conference (which ended by the well-known speeches by HH Pope Francis and the Grand Imam, Sheikh Al Tayeb), I raised the question of how overcoming violence and terror is a matter of taking the faith in One God seriously. This has to do with the impact of the faith in God as the creator of all and therefore the protector and loving God to every human being. We are accountable to one another as to how we

prevent violence, but this cannot be separated from our accountability to God. We are called to be the guardian of the sister and the brother, as they are created by God. Furthermore, precisely because of the faith in One God, the creator of all that lives, we cannot use this faith as an excuse for exclusion from the fellowship of humanity. The state must express this belonging together in offering shared citizenship, where all have the same rights and duties in relations to one another. Different faiths, different formulations of faith, cannot be a reason for exclusion in the human fellowship. If exclusion becomes a matter of violence, even in the name of God, it becomes a blasphemy against the One God, creator of all. We continue our reflections on how to overcome the tragic and dangerous connections between religion and violence, and we should be ready to claim even stronger the rights to be protected from violence as we speak for our Christian sisters and brothers.

Since we were in China together, experiencing how the church in China and the Christians there have experienced new times of fellowship and being connected to the global church after years of isolation, we have been addressing many issues together that move us forward. We are moving in the broken, polarized world, but also into a deeper commitment to work for the unity for which we are created, and the unity for which we are saved through the crucifixion and the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ. We also see how religion, and also our Christian faith, can be used by the mightiest powers in this world to create injustice, racism, discrimination, and lack of commitment to unity in justice and peace for all. But while leaders of countries will have the interest of their nation as their first priority, it is also clear that many see that the interest of the nation also extends to peace between nations, and caring for the world. We should firmly proclaim that the interest of a group or a nation in the longer perspective is what also serves the whole of humanity. Particularly clearly we see this when we monitor the follow-up of the Paris agreement to end global warming beyond the 2-degrees objective.

The call to unity is not obsolete, it is more urgent than ever. The call to unity for a common and shared witness to Christ is a key dimension of being the one church of Jesus Christ. The challenges we face in the ecumenical movement and in the WCC to express this unity fully, should not lead us to ignore the call to be one, but to more efforts and more perspectives to what it means to be one.

3. The WCC and the focus on visible unity today in our many programmes and initiatives

“The primary purpose of the fellowship of churches in the World Council 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” (Constitution and Rules of the World Council of Churches, as amended by the 10th Assembly of the WCC in Busan, Republic of Korea, 2013).

We are in a very interesting phase at the moment as the WCC Commission on Faith and Order is receiving responses to the first comprehensive Faith and Order document on ecclesiology. This is the most comprehensive and significant common theological reflection we have had on our understanding of the church in the WCC. This is not only about the theme of “unity,” but we know that differences in ecclesiology (the theological understanding of the basis, the mission and the order of the church) are significant for how much we can or cannot express our visible unity of the church. The Commission on Faith and Order is meeting next week in South Africa to work together on this process of reception, and we really look forward to the further outcome of this process.

When the Central Committee decided on the theme of the 10th Assembly, we had several proposals and at the end we were discussing whether the theme should include the word “unity” in addition to what we apparently agreed upon: God of life, lead us to justice and peace. After listening to the debate for a while, I recognized that the word “unity” was dividing more than it was uniting. On the other hand, I understood that the CC wanted a theme and a focus that could unite us as churches and not divide us. Paradoxically, we got a consensus because we refrained from using the terminology of unity.

However, I remember the support I could sense in the audience when I suggested that exactly the prayer, the openness to seek together for justice and peace is a genuine expression of our search for unity. In the statement of unity from Busan we read “The unity of the church and the unity of humankind are interconnected.”

I could hear a reluctance to talk about the unity of the church, the visible unity of the church in the faith, in the sacraments and in the ordained ministry. Some disappointments and experiences of churches going in different directions in some important questions for the faith and life of the churches, in spite of significant results of multilateral and bilateral dialogues, e.g., as they are formulated in the Faith and Order papers.

We accept that the “status quo” in the WCC is that we do not demand consensus in all questions, and that we accept that we do not have the significant level of shared faith and order to express our unity in Christ fully and visibly. We also have to accept that there are more issues coming forward that create challenges for the unity in the churches and among us. Still, there is a wide and amazing acceptance of the WCC as a platform, an ecumenical space, where we do respect one another as churches and work toward more openness, accountability and love expressed in our common Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace. The fact that we work with consensus procedures has led to another acceptance also of the differences between us as something we can tolerate in this level of fellowship.

The just and inclusive community of women and men, adults and children, people of different identities and mixed identities must be addressed as a genuine issue of the unity we are calling for and called to pursue in our midst. This is indeed an expression of the connection between the unity of the church and the unity of humankind. We are reminded: “A true community of women and men is God’s gift and promise for humanity, which is created ‘in God’s image’ – male and female (Gen 1:27); and the church, as prophetic sign of that which God desires for women and men, is called to embody that community in its own life.”

As we continue this pilgrimage together towards 2018, 20 years after the commemoration of the end of the ecumenical Decade of Churches in Solidarity with Women (1988-1998), we celebrate the gift of our unity against gender-based violence through the Thursdays in Black campaign. Although this intergenerational campaign has become a significant symbolic action against rape and violence, we need to develop it further so that we have more concrete follow-up in building proper attitudes and in advocacy work in the international and national arenas. An example is the WCC’s Just Community of Women and Men’s strategy to strengthen this advocacy tool with the annual gender advocacy training using the international mechanisms, including the Convention to Eliminate All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW). It is crucial that the gender advocacy training equip our member churches to prophetically hold their states accountable to the UN women’s human rights mechanism they have ratified.

On the issue of adults and children, there are two examples of how we can improve our unity through proper communication. The first is the creation of intergenerational safe spaces, a methodology developed by the WCC-EHAIA in order to improve communication among children, young adults and adults. In such spaces they engage in genuine dialogue to solve together causes of HIV. This methodology was developed after the realization that we are not communicating in such a way that helps solve our problems. The same methodology can be applied in other areas of communication across generations to solve problems and find answers together. The second is our work on Churches’ Commitments to Children, which has created spaces for dialogue among children, young adults and adults. I encourage churches to use the resources developed for mutual support and to consider implementing the commitments through joint efforts.

In the case of people of different identities and mixed identities, we need a psycho-spiritual framework informed by theological and biblical reflections to solve the current problem of violence against people

who are different from us. Churches have a contribution to make in this area based on our profound Christian belief that every human life has dignity and value that have to be protected because we are created in the image of God. Moreover, religion at its very core and nature should be life-giving and promote peace. It cannot be used to justify the violation of any of God's creation without contradicting itself.

The mandate of the WCC defined by the 10th Assembly includes a strong commitment to work for the peace and unity in the Korean peninsula. This very special unsolved and unsettled situation, still defined only by an armistice treaty, not a peace treaty, is an increased threat to the people of Korea, the North East Asia region, but also to the peace of the world. This has increased by the escalation of military activity and the building of the capacity to have and use nuclear weapons in North Korea, but also the increased military activity and the enormous American military presence in the peninsula. My deep conviction is that the churches – and civil society – have a huge potential in building trustful relations, opening the doors for cooperation and dialogue, and to advocate for peaceful, diplomatic and political solutions to the escalating conflict. The new president of South Korea affirmed this strongly in the meeting we had with him recently in Seoul. The churches and the ecumenical bodies, NCKK, WCC, and the WCRC, are significant in the history of democratization and peacebuilding in the Korean peninsula, and should pursue their way for justice and peace with the parties, particularly at this new opportunity given with the new democratic beginning in South Korea.

This should be given all the attention and commitment we have, as was also clearly expressed in Busan and in the subsequent process led by the WCC. We should use all our influence as the WCC and as member churches in our respective countries to support political initiatives for political processes that can lead to reduced tensions, normalization of relations, to a new time of unity in diversity for the people of Korea.

The Global Christian Forum (GCF) has gone through an important evaluation and restructuring in terms of who takes responsibility for the proper continuation of this initiative from the WCC 19 years ago. The GCF has offered an opportunity to interact with other church traditions (particularly Evangelical and Pentecostal churches) that have had other emphases in their quest for unity than the Eucharistic fellowship we are searching for according to the basis of the WCC.

A meeting hosted by the WCC in Bossey recently clarified both the character of the GCF as a platform, a forum, not an organization or a group with the mandate to pursue alternative ecumenism or make statements on behalf of the partners. The four “pillars,” the WCC, WEA, PCPCU and WPF, agreed to share the responsibility to facilitate the GCF, on the conditions that it is a consultative body and has no aspirations beyond gathering people to build relations, address issues of common concern and interest, and to stimulate better relations between the partners involved. The effect of the almost 20 years of the GCF has been seen in notably improved and more extensive relations and cooperation between partners that had few or difficult relations before. The need to address our common challenges and our common call to witness and service together, has been strongly affirmed. The WCC has had a significant role from the beginning and continues to have it. We have as the WCC reminded the partners that the opposite of “visible unity” is not “invisible unity” but “visible division”.

The meeting also offered good conversations and new ideas were tested. The general secretary of the WEA, Bishop Efraim Tendero, proposed that we establish a joint working group between the WCC and the WEA, addressing common agendas like human rights, religious freedom, climate change, economic justice, peace initiatives, et cetera. I think this could be another very strategic move forward, as we could establish channels for our own initiatives that could go beyond what we have at the moment.

This initiative in establishing the GCF to extend the circle of relations, building a platform that could give some signs of visible unity has had certain challenges, particularly in the understanding of the tasks of this forum, and the limits of those tasks. But there are many reasons to continue this cooperation and to harvest even more fruits from it.

The unity of peoples and nations must in almost every case be developed as a multicultural and multireligious society. This fact creates a lot of challenges that are to be addressed in all parts of the world. The increased migration, at a level higher than ever since WWII, represents enormous challenges but also always new possibilities. The churches' role in giving a value base for how to address migration, and particularly the very high number of refugees, should be one of our assets and contributions to many nations in search for new solutions. The care for the human dignity of everybody, as well as the human rights for refugees and migrants, must be a joint priority for churches around the world. Again, we are challenged in our understanding of the one humanity living in one world created by one God. We should continue our role of defining the dignity and rights of everybody as the basis for our living together, respecting international law and most of all, calling and working for just peace in areas of armed conflict. Without peace we cannot pursue our calling to unity.

4. The WCC – a fellowship of churches – praying, working, and communicating with one another

We are implementing the CUV, the common understanding and vision of the WCC given as a result of the processes some 15-20 years ago: The WCC is a fellowship of churches. We have developed new methodologies of consensus-making, we have developed new methods of working together, we are developing new methods of communicating, we are building relations of many qualities, we are doing a lot together. I think we should pay even more attention to how important it is to be sharing life in solidarity, compassion, and joy, developing relations of spirituality, nurturing human relations, praying together. The special commission on Orthodox participation in the WCC paid a lot of attention to how these prayers can happen in a way that all can participate in.

We are taking new initiatives in this respect in calling for prayers together, sharing prayers. The Global Day of Prayer to End Famine became a significant expression of this role of the WCC. As is the initiative to pray together for unity and just peace in Jerusalem and in any place in the world on Pentecost Monday this year – as we have common dates for Easter and Pentecost this year.

Unity has a lot to do with information and communication. The work we do for unity is not only something we should share information about, it is also something we pursue through means of communication. The many new initiatives of communication of our work and in our work have given many tangible results already in terms of much more attention to the work of the WCC, more participation, more responses and affirmation for the relevance of what we do, more attention to the different parts of the fellowship. Through the communication department we have extended the means of communication we have through our website, which probably should be renewed soon, and through an extensive use of social media in combination with more traditional channels. The sharing in the fellowship that happens through these new initiatives gives another experience and understanding of being a fellowship of churches.

We have also seen that more extensive use of communication tools, also in cooperation with the capacities of partners, we are able to move quickly, with flexibility and efficiency, and build capacities in our sister organizations and member churches for more effective communication.

The recent initiative coordinated by the WCC-EAA for a day of prayer to end famine showed the enormous potential coordinated and targeted communication can bring. More than 70 million people had seen and/or responded to the initiative. We are encouraged in the trust in the WCC for being the leading agent and the source of spirituality and insight in the themes to be addressed.

I am more and more convinced that ecumenism increasingly will be about communication, building relations through all the media available for us today. The access to electronic means of communication is almost the same all over the world, and plays an enormous role in developing the

world relationships in the future – for good and for worse. We can use our potential based on our legacy of values, our relations, our possibilities to meet and to learn, as a great contribution to building relations in the time ahead of us.

In my study of ecumenical attitudes, I found that the WCC had developed a terminology (used a lot in other contexts) of the costly unity we seek (Olav Fykse Tveit: *The Truth We Owe Each Other*, WCC Publications, 2016). The attitude of “mutual accountability” is in my view absolutely basic in the biblical understanding of the church (cf. the image of the body of Christ and the call to accountability to one another in all the letters of the New Testament dealing with ecclesial questions). It is significant in the ecumenical movement, because it focuses on what we all can contribute to unity, and how the common efforts to express unity in diversity must also have a strong dimension of binding, accountable relationships. I find that the best ways of nurturing structures and attitudes of mutual accountability toward unity of the church is found in the World Council of Churches and in other conciliar forms of working together.

The world’s instruments for justice, peace and development given in the UN and its many bodies are calling for mutual accountability to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). They are more interrelated than such goals have been before. They express in different ways a lot of our agenda for justice and peace as the WCC, and particularly how this agenda belongs to our work together with the many partners promoting international diakonia. We have now the privilege to discuss and promote a new document on ecumenical diakonia. This is a new momentum we shall not just let pass, but use as a genuine opportunity to show how we are mutually accountable to the call to unity of the church serving the unity of humankind.

5. United in our efforts for the development of the Ecumenical Centre in Geneva

A very concrete challenge for our work together leading the WCC, is to make important further assessments and decisions for the building project for the Ecumenical Centre in Geneva. This is a very concrete task of the organization in our time, to secure the future use of this unique space for the WCC and the ecumenical movement, and the future economical sustainability of the WCC as an organization. It is time to be well updated of the decisions made by the governing bodies in the past, the work to follow up these decisions, and the alternatives at the table in this phase. We need to discuss with our partners, particularly Implem, with whom we have signed a comprehensive contract, and among ourselves, to take this responsibility of moving the project forward towards the best result possible – and beginning first with the important matter of reimbursing the loan taken to address the former pension fund deficit, on the major financial challenges which the WCC has had.

The architects have been working on a master plan for the Green Village project which also asks us to consider “unity,” this time in the context of architectural expression through form, materials, and landscaping. There is a need to ensure formally that the serenity and harmony of the original Green Village concepts will be implemented in the future, even when different architects and investors are called to be involved in the project in the next years. The firm LRS architects will seek our affirmation and guidance on the approach taken so far in defining the guidelines.

6. The call to unity - towards the 11th Assembly

The Executive Committee will start its reflection on what kind of assembly we want in 2021 and what should be the profile and the focus for this event. The assemblies are more than sessions for business and decision-making. Even more they are gatherings to discern the signs of the time, to assess the contribution of the WCC to the world and the life of the churches.

As we also pursue the midterm evaluation of what we have done and achieved so far, we should not underplay the role of being an agent for unity. My understanding of the call from Busan to be together on a Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace is that it is growing and materializing as a way to move together in the ecumenical movement that also offers new contributions to unity in its many dimensions. It can be seen as a theme, a uniting motto, a perspective that brings together our faith traditions and our common witness and service, an approach that calls for more openness, flexibility, and humility. Here we are willing to face the realities of our lives in the world, to share the gifts of our churches and traditions, and to work seriously on the challenges and the divisions we experience. We know that the ecumenical movement of love is the ecumenical movement of the cross and the ecumenical movement of the resurrection. These days we celebrate and give thanks that it is the living Spirit of God that creates every day the world, our lives as human beings, that also creates every day the church, and our lives as disciples of Christ.

I hope that as we continue our journey toward the 11th Assembly, we are not shying away from reflections on our call to call one another to unity, even if we are not able to fulfill some of the aspirations and hopes for full, visible, ecclesial unity at the moment. I believe, though, that coming generations will be asking more for the expressions of unity in diversity, shaping the churches' contribution to more justice, more peace, more unity in a highly polarized, unjust, but also more interconnected world. The relevance of the WCC will not decrease but increase, as an instrument for setting new agendas and bringing new ideas and initiatives that can bring real hope to the world.

Jerusalem, 5 June, 2017
Rev. Dr Olav Fykse Tveit,
General Secretary
