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Original

## **70th Anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (revised)**

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1. The 70th anniversary of the World Council of Churches (WCC) in 2018 coincides with the 70th anniversary of the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR). The ecumenical movement made significant contributions to the articulation of this foundational instrument of modern international human rights law, in particular through the early work of the Commission of the Churches on International Affairs (CCIA) notably in the drafting of UDHR Article 18 on freedom of religion or belief. The WCC has remained steadfastly and continuously committed to the realization of the human rights codified in the UDHR and the international human rights treaties which have emanated from it.
2. As declared by the WCC Fifth Assembly in Nairobi in 1975, our concern for human rights is based on our conviction that God wills a society in which all can enjoy 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.
3. The WCC Sixth Assembly in Vancouver in 1983 underscored the essential Christian calling and motivation for engagement in working for human rights, observing that love of our neighbour is the essence of obedience to God.
4. In this ecumenical work for human rights, we have been particularly focussed on responding to the victims of injustice and oppression: "We manifest the life of the Spirit by striving for the release of those who are captive to sin by standing with the oppressed in their struggle for liberation, justice and peace. Liberated by the Spirit, we are empowered to understand the world from the perspective of the poor and vulnerable and to give ourselves to mission, service and the sharing of resources." (WCC Seventh Assembly, Canberra, 1991)
5. Meeting in the year of the 50th anniversary of the UDHR, the WCC Eighth Assembly in Harare in 1998 experienced again God's call to justice, "and this leads us to reaffirm our commitment to human rights, to the dignity and worth of the human person created in God's image and infinitely precious in God's sight, and to the equal rights of women and men, of young and old, of all nations and peoples." The Assembly recognized the adoption of the UDHR as "one of the landmark achievements of humanity", but acknowledged "the many shortcomings of the churches' actions for human rights; ...our unwillingness or inability to act when people were threatened or suffered; ...our failure to stand up for people who have experienced violence and discrimination; ...our complicity with the principalities, powers and structures of our time responsible for massive violations of human rights; and .the withdrawal of many churches from work on human rights as a priority of Christian witness."
6. We recognize and lament the fact that in many parts of the world today the legitimacy of the principles and obligations expressed in international human rights law are being undermined and attacked as never before. As the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Zeid Ra'ad Al Hussein has recently remarked, human rights are no longer treated as a priority, but as a pariah.

7. In the year of the 70th anniversary of both the WCC and the UDHR, the WCC central committee meeting in Geneva, Switzerland, 15-21 June 2018:

- Strongly **reaffirms** the commitment of the WCC to the principles of human dignity and human rights and to the commitments expressed in international human rights law as codified in the UDHR and the family of international human rights treaties.<sup>1</sup>
- **Reasserts** that international human rights law is an essential framework for the promotion, protection and practical recognition of the God-given human dignity of every human being.
- **Calls** on WCC member churches and ecumenical partners to re-prioritize human rights and active support for the legal instruments of international human rights law as a bulwark against injustice, oppression, occupation, and tyranny.
- **Proposes**, in response to the new challenges confronting the legal architecture of human rights, a new process of ecumenical reflection and consultation on the relationship between international human rights law and scripture, theology and Christian ethics, also engaging inter-religious, civil society, governmental and intergovernmental partners in this process. The central committee invites the CCIA, the Commission on Faith and Order, the Commission on World Mission and Evangelism, and the Commission on Education and Ecumenical Formation to consider possible collaboration in such a process, leading up to the next WCC Assembly.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/ProfessionalInterest/Pages/UniversalHumanRightsInstruments.aspx>