



Moderator's Address

Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace: Discerning the Landscape Together

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1. I greet you, brothers and sisters, in the name of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Let us thank God for this opportunity to meet again as the central committee after two years; and let me express my gratitude to you all for prayers and fellowship after the demise of my husband. Our meeting this time is in this historic city of Trondheim, known as the cradle of Catholic, Lutheran and Jewish faith traditions and also for its history, culture, technology and universities. We also meet at a moment in time when churches in many parts of the world, especially in Scandinavia and Europe, are preparing themselves to commemorate the 500th anniversary of Martin Luther's Reformation. A significant place and moment indeed to be enriched as we move along in our pilgrimage! I would like to thank the leaders of the Church of Norway and of Trondheim, in particular, for receiving us so warmly and for their generous hospitality.
2. We pray that our deliberations here would inspire, equip and accompany the various constituents of the World Council of Churches which we represent here, to join in the Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace and in the process discover afresh our ecumenical vocation in the world today.

***Koinonia* as partnership for justice and peace**

3. While those at the constituting assembly of the WCC in Amsterdam in 1948 said that they commit themselves to "stay together," at the 10th Assembly in Busan in 2013, we told each other that we would "move together," as a movement of churches, living out our hope of God's reign along the way, together and each in our own contexts. Let us hope that during this pilgrimage, our fellowship will find its ultimate purpose through greater expressions of partnership for God's justice, thereby bringing together unity and justice, which at times were pursued separately during these past years. I also see this as a moment of celebration in anticipation that our long cherished goal of the "unity of the Church for the unity of humankind" would soon be a reality in the many and varied expressions of churches, working for the realization of the vision of God's reign in our lives and those of generations to come.
4. One particular point of engagement that we have identified for the work of this session of the central committee is discerning the landscape together. Discernment is about seeking a holistic understanding of a given reality and clarity of purpose in order that we make right decisions accordingly. Let me, therefore, emphasize that this exercise of discernment is to be pro-active in that we do not settle for what is viable and convenient for each of us within our resources, vantage points, institutional considerations and capacities but instead overcome or enhance the same in response to what God is calling us to do as God's witnesses in the world today.

God's justice as our vantage point to discern the landscape

5. The first step, therefore, is to ask: how do we look at the landscape; through what and whose perspective or lenses do we discern? We are aware that we attempt to do so as churches, as institutions, and organizations in different contexts, with distinct theological orientations, geo-political considerations, and cultural preferences. Besides these, we also recognize that much of our patterns of responses have been shaped and continue to be influenced by the legacy of the past – the predominantly western, confessional theological and philosophical tools of analysis and interpretation. While I affirm the strong theological foundation that these provided to the ecumenical movement of the 20th century, I must

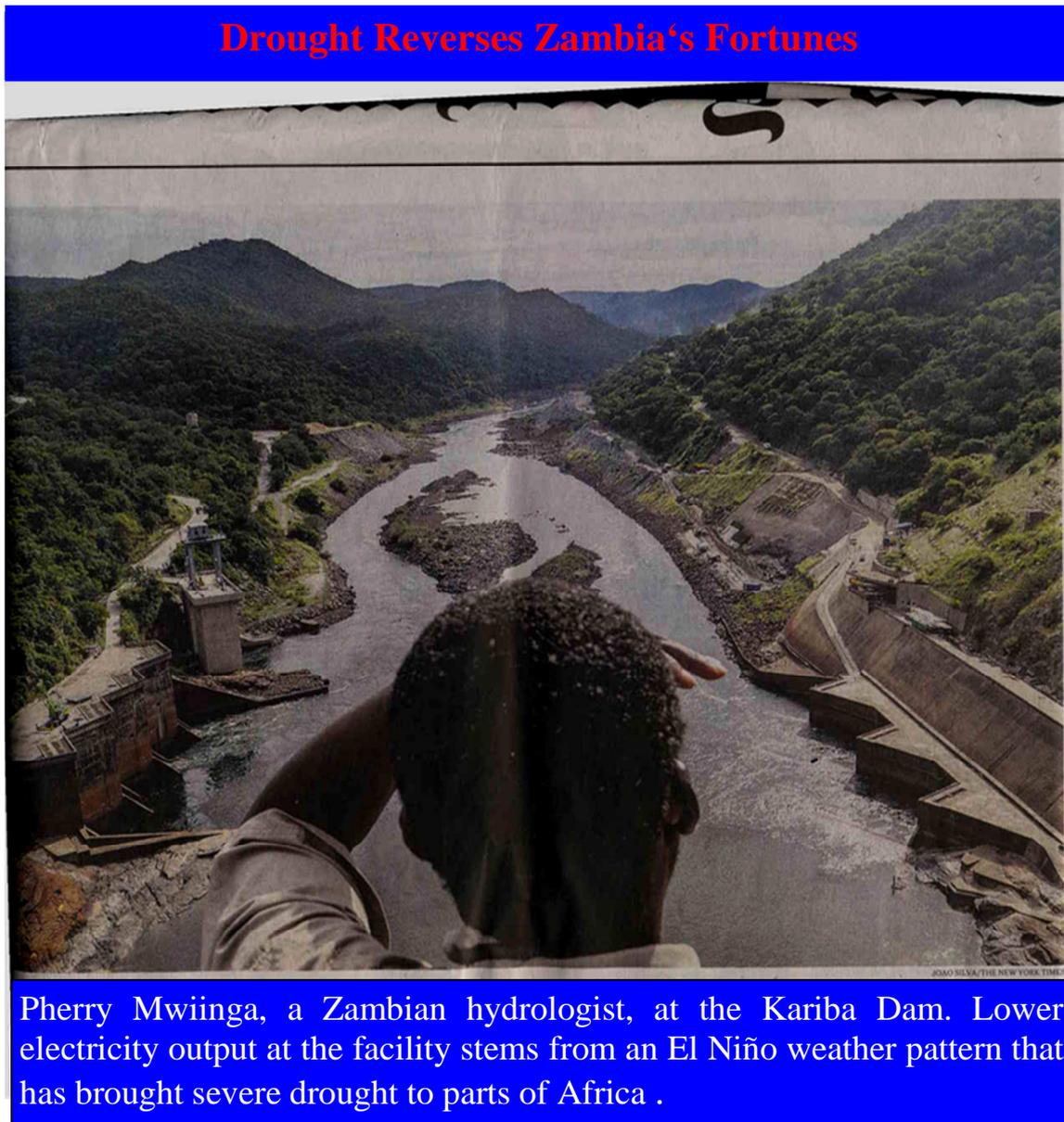
underline that these were shaped from the vantage points of power and privilege in certain predominantly Christian geo-political contexts.

6. I say this because the reality today is that we live in a much changed, a rapidly changing, and increasingly pluralistic world, and so are realities of Christian presence and witness. Furthermore, just as much as there are manifold challenges to justice and peace, there are also hundreds and thousands of communities, movements, and initiatives striving for the same. In addition, there are also a number of civil society organizations (CSOs), non-governmental organizations (NGOs), academics and public intellectuals imagining and pursuing justice and peace, each from their own perspective, with their own tools of interrogation and interpretation. There are those who concentrate their efforts exclusively on certain aspects of justice, such as economic justice, ecological justice, rights and opportunities, etc.; and there are also those who while advocating for one expression of justice ignore other aspirations of justice. For example, I have seen some advocates of economic justice deliberately choosing to ignore the intersections of racism and other forms of discrimination that make injustice more intense in the experience of certain socially disempowered communities. I have also met some gender justice activists who keep the agenda of racial justice out of their purview. There are also those who shout for peace only when their own safety is threatened and while advocating for peace, deliberately ignore the violence inherent in our social and economic structures. We all can cite a number of such instances of pursuits of incomplete concepts of justice and peace. In such a situation of many on the way, what is the distinct resource that we carry with us to share with others; and what is our unique perspective or vantage point as a global community of churches with diverse identities and in many geo-political contexts to pursue justice and peace? And more importantly, what is common about our visions of justice and peace? As a people of the way, on the way, we, churches and church institutions, have a great responsibility.

7. I would like to emphasize that the justice we seek is God's justice, which is different from the many ways it is understood and pursued (Micah 6:8). God's justice is holistic and is radically different from certain pursuits that ignore the inherent or imposed inequalities and consequent dynamics of power in human societies and relationships (Exodus 23:6; Psalms 9:16). As such, it is a biased justice, biased towards the victims, the sinned against – the disempowered and the marginalized, the discriminated and the despised, the abused and the violated, the imprisoned and tortured, the displaced and the impoverished. It holds that as long as some are treated unjustly and denied life, justice is never real and complete. While it heals and restores the dignity of the victim, it also transforms the aggressor (Proverbs 21:15). The reluctance and inability to be just is as dehumanized a condition as being a victim of injustice. God's justice seeks to transform all structures of human relationships and negotiations, by upholding the dignity and sanctity of all that God created and continues to create in wisdom and love, and the interconnectedness of life. It is this dispensation of justice that heralds God's peace, a polity of peace that is different from what the world offers, one that is real and lasting and for all. As such, this vocation of peace with justice is not a mere social engagement but a deeply spiritual one, one that witnesses to the victory of God's justice in the crucified and risen Lord. It is from this vantage point of God's justice, that I ask us to discern the landscape with a view to identifying the signposts of what God wants us to do. Based on this premise of the vantage point of the marginalized and those in struggles for justice, dignity and freedom, I would like to propose a few moral and spiritual challenges for our reflection.

Landscape: The reality of challenges and possibilities

8. First is the reality of the embrace of the market economy and its concomitant culture and values by all nations, communities, families, and people. The creation and accumulation of wealth are pursued as normative since wealth is seen as the ultimate solution for all problems. Greed is unshackled and injustice is institutionalized. With increased accents on economic growth and individual self-fulfilment, those few with access to wealth and opportunities, while satiating their greed, circulate their own visions of development, exploit and destroy the earth and dehumanize many, the majority of whom are those made vulnerable by social, economic and political structures.



9. The consequences of this idolatry of mammon are too evident as disasters – natural and human-made – strike, devastating and displacing millions of lives and communities. We are not oblivious to recent horrendous events such as tornadoes, hurricanes, fires, persistent droughts and many other climate changes that occur on a daily basis, all of which have ravaged many communities and are likely to decimate some, especially those nations without resources, technical skills, and clear and adequate solutions as they are not privy to the real causes. But those in the know and are major contributors of climate injustice resist harkening to the cry and voice of reason for change, insisting on continuing negotiation in boardrooms over percentages of carbon emissions. In spite of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), which aimed at reducing extreme poverty and hunger by 2015, nothing much has changed, with a small percentage of people owning large portions of wealth and with millions being pushed into more intense forms of poverty and misery. Furthermore, with supra-national institutions setting the rules, dissent is ruthlessly suppressed and human rights defenders are tortured, killed and forced to disappear in many contexts of the world. Let us hope that the UN's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), whose motto is "that no one will be left out," will make a difference to the 800 million people who still live in extreme poverty and the 90 million children under the age of five and 790 million adults who are malnourished, according to the MDG September 2015 Assessment Report. However, these "17 goals to transform our world" are silent on checking greed and social injustice, which I believe is necessary for any vision of development to be complete.

10. Second is the global phenomenon of the “fear of the other.” We live in a pluralistic world, increasingly so with the phenomenal multi-directional movement of people on a daily basis in search of livelihood and of freedom from poverty, violence and war. With increased preoccupation with wealth and resources, further accelerated by the ideology of the market economy, negotiations among communities have turned conflictual, resulting in hostile attitudes toward the other, viewing the other as a predator, as an enemy rather than as a fellow human being in need of space and opportunity to survive. Sadly, there doesn't seem to be a place that is free of xenophobia and the consequential violation of and violence against minorities, migrants and refugees, many of whom are actually victims of war and poverty caused by global economic and military powers and political systems. These attitudes of fear and hatred of the other are stabilizing themselves as ideologies that privilege the majority – whether religious, ethnic or linguistic. What is ironic is that the powerful nations and former colonial powers seem more in this grip of fear. The fear of the powerful is as dangerous as their greed. The images of rejection and mistreatment of millions fleeing from war and violence in recent times are still fresh in our minds. Let us remind ourselves that our faith teaches us to be hospitable and to welcome the stranger, for in so doing, we do it unto our Lord Jesus himself (Matthew 25:25). I would like in this regard to commend the churches in Europe for their sensitive and generous response and for their great witness, even if it meant facing the ire of their governments and the majority.

11. Third are the unsettling tides of secularization on the one hand and the rise of militant religious fanaticism on the other. Both make life miserable for the vulnerable people and the marginalized sectors. While secularization has been helpful in getting out of the hold of redundant and life-stifling obscurantist religious practice for many, it has also, however, created possibilities to nurture attitudes that disregard the sanctity of life and thus perhaps inadvertently lend its hand to the on-going commodification of human life and relationships. Religious fundamentalism, on the other hand, is using religious identities and visions to terrorize, dominate, control and destroy those who do not subject themselves to the power aspirations of its protagonists or subscribe to their visions of the world. Oppressive cultures and practices are brought back to life and reintroduced as icons of nationalism and patriotism. In many contexts, non-state actors are aggressively controlling public behaviour and social relationships with a view to ensuring their continued hegemony.

12. Fourth is the pervasive logic of violence and war as the only viable way to settle disputes, differences and conflicts between and within nations, among communities and people. The realities of violence in many forms and expressions by all human collectives, terrorism and state terrorism, and the shameful reality of some nations manufacturing and selling weapons of mass destruction to boost their economies, points toward yet another sign of moral decadence of our times. For example, roughly 75 per cent of US military aid in the past three years went to Israel and Egypt alone, according to the US Government Foreign Assistance Report. The US arms manufacturers earned over \$10 billion in revenue. There are also others, UK, Russia, Israel, China, etc., in the same business, yet also in the forefront of peace negotiations. It should not escape our minds that women and girls remain pawns of any conflict as they bear most of the brunt of violence and war.

13. Fifth is unbridled technological development. Technology has colonized all aspects of our life, offering solutions for everything – needs and necessities as well as our desires and fantasies. Even as technology presents opportunities for improved living conditions and reduced human suffering, it also leaves us with questions and challenges about its potentialities in an unequal world. In a world that seems to be driven by the logic of the survival of the fittest, we must be aware of the way unbridled technology has caused and continues to cause harm to the earth's eco-system and to many around the world. In other words, what does technological advancement mean to those who are disempowered, marginalized and decimated with the same sophisticated technological development? That is a question that exposes yet another serious moral dilemma.

14. Last and with the largest impact of all of these features are the large-scale marginalization, exclusion and dehumanization of millions of people around the world. These are those who have for centuries been disempowered, discriminated against and kept impoverished by structurally and culturally embedded forms of injustice. Their faces and names are many – the once colonized who continue to be colonized,

Indigenous Peoples, people of African descent, stateless people, ethnic and religious minorities, Dalits, people with disabilities, women, children and many others. Unfortunately, some of these communities experience discrimination and exclusion in many of our churches.

15. On a recent visit to the US as part of WCC racial justice solidarity visit, I was shocked to find how racism is still rampant in many aspects of life and how some churches are still divided along those lines. It was brought to our attention as the solidarity team that mass incarceration in the US targets mainly young men of African descent and their imprisonment is to feed the greed of mammon, in this case privately leased prisons that must be filled with prisoners in order for the owners to be paid for their use. The young men are also victims of police violence and killings. Racial injustice is not only a reality and fact in the US; racism is also rearing its ugly head in other parts of the world; and while we have to reiterate our position as WCC that racism is a *sin*, we must act now. Let me commend the Black Lives Matter Movement (BLM) of young people who have taken it upon themselves to remind us of the sanctity of life and that such killings and mass incarceration must stop. Likewise, I commend the churches and church leaders in the US who have been on the forefront, marching to protest against this heinous act, including mass deportations of individuals that leave families separated. Every life – black, brown, white, red – is as valuable as any other, and every human being is created in the image of God (Gen. 1:26). All lives matter. The issues of racism have not been on the WCC agenda for a while; and I suggest that the National Council of Churches of Christ in the USA and WCC organize appropriate consultations and activities to address this wounded history and agree on how to press on to combat racism. As an African, I am also aware that we need to continue and even find appropriate entry points with our brothers and sisters of African descent to discern how we move together in the future after the history of slavery and the 2016 African Union vision of *The Africa We Want*.

16. Furthermore, trafficking of people for cheap and forced labour, organ harvesting and the sex industry have become commonplace all over the world. According to the Global Slavery Index 2016, about 45 million men, women and children are trapped in modern slavery, with bonded labour, begging and prostitution as the major forms. What then do we say about this generation, our generation that boasts of many achievements of human intellect thriving by subjugating and exploiting millions of vulnerable people? Indeed, a serious moral challenge, a fact that should make us hang our heads in shame!

17. These and similar trends reveal that we belong to a generation that seems to thrive on and boast about its advancement by abusing and exploiting the more vulnerable human beings and the earth. What is disheartening is the total absence of any moral force that holds these powers accountable and a counter-ideology or alternate discourse that provokes our conscience to be nurturers, rather than destroyers, of life.

18. Unfortunately, most faith communities, including Christian, seem either too preoccupied in furthering their own interests of safety and growth, and power and prominence, or too enthusiastic for getting co-opted by these powers, which operate through governments, international financial institutions, or corporate houses to endorse their visions of the world. This is perhaps a red flag that we need to be aware of in our pilgrimage. Instead, how can we be catalysts of a moral force – how can we activate a moral authority of the church/faith community and an alternate vision in partnership with other faith communities and social movements who are likewise restless about the moral decadence of our world? How can we enhance the efforts of and work with those who we believe and are committed to the values of God's kingdom, even if they do not say so, rather than remain silent and inert toward those who are actively working against it and furthering their own empires?

Challenges as opportunities

19. Thinking further, let me reiterate that pilgrimage is a journey that involves introspection, openness to learning through new encounters, changing and effecting change, shedding cumbersome weights and accruing helpful resources, and reaching the goal together. I would like to highlight a few possibilities that I believe will help our reflection to result in some decisive shifts.

20. First of all, pilgrimage requires an attitude of humility and repentance. We certainly have wrestled with some of these challenges in the past and have undoubtedly made some gains, and we thank God for these. Yet we need to constantly introspect on how much our reflective processes and consequent affirmations result in concrete action, in making a difference on the ground in the lives of the people on whose behalf we speak. Analysis, interpretation and statements seem to exhaust all that we do for justice and peace in our ecumenical gatherings. Where and what difference have these made, and what difference have we made as participants of these organizations – these are questions that we need to ask ourselves. It is perhaps time that we moved from rhetoric to action. The complex challenges that we face today and the witness of many already in the forefront of struggles demand that we move away from the culture of conferences and statements and begin to get engaged in actions that nurture hope and alternatives. What story do we have to share along the journey, stories of people in struggle against injustice and of hope? I would encourage all of us, in fact, each one of us to come to the next meeting of the central committee with a story of your personal participation in the pilgrimage. Let us share and be enriched by these experiences of hope and be inspired to do more as we move along.

21. Second, it is one thing to speak about injustice out there in the public square, but it is a completely different thing to deal with it right within our household. Abuse of power, deliberate silence and indifference on issues of justice, excessive pre-occupation with ecclesiastical issues, discrimination and restriction of all God's people at our tables of celebration and discernment and deliberation, and the continued monopolization of institutional spaces by some for long stretches that leaves hardly any space for the younger generation, do not make our assertions and affirmations about justice any more credible than empty rhetoric. While churches cannot be exempt from social influences, we need to uphold the integrity of our moral choices in the way we organize and manage our institutional expressions. To that extent, we must ensure that WCC not only remains a role model but also a trend setter in healthy processes of transparency and accountability, and of inclusion and participation by all who belong to the church.

22. Third, since the denial of justice and absence of peace are primarily expressions of irresponsible assertions of power and dominance, we must, in the example of our Lord Jesus Christ, actively be engaged in renouncing values and attitudes that glorify power and all vestiges that keep us trapped in fear of power, and denounce systems and cultures that diminish and deny life. In the same vein, we are called to hold the international financial institutions, military powers, economic policies, industry and political systems accountable rather than simply opting to be their endorsing agents. We need to address the root causes of migration and unemployment and expose and confront war-mongering and weapons industries and those models of development that ruthlessly plunder the earth and displace people to that extent. Pilgrimage is opting for costly discipleship.

23. Fourthly, pilgrimage is about hope breaking into our present, motivating us to move forward, overcoming hurdles, exploring and inventing creative possibilities along the way. It is a time to encounter God's liberating and transforming grace present and active in unexpected places and people, and to announce hope, through a creative engagement with the world. Hope in God in Jesus Christ compels us to discover something new and attempt something different. We therefore need to move from the nostalgia of the past, set aside our burdensome preoccupations and instruments that have outlived their purpose, and venture into new and relevant areas of engagement. At one point in time, the member churches and organizations needed instruments like the WCC, REOs, NCCs and others to bring them together and to learn to work together. Now our member churches are far ahead with their own creative ecumenical engagement in their specific contexts. We must perhaps refrain from functioning in the same mould and with same methodology of programmatic work in certain areas that we have done for decades. We need to reset our priorities and methodology as part of our work to accompany the member churches in the pilgrimage.

Ecumenical instruments as catalysts

24. Against this background, we also need to reflect on the role of ecumenical instruments such as the WCC, REOs and NCCs. What does it take to enable them to become more active and sustained in their ministry of accompanying churches and in promoting ecumenical action for justice and peace?

25. The vocation of justice and peace is not confined to specialized ministries but an essential mark of Christian discipleship and hence deeply spiritual both at personal and larger levels. However, sadly, many Christians keep these outside the ambit of religious practice. We have also relegated the essential responsibilities of mission, *diakonia* and public engagement to mission boards and specialized ministries. Some of us have taken up the responsibility of doing these on behalf of the churches rather than enabling churches to actively engage themselves. The challenge before us is: how do we encourage, enable and assist our churches to live out their love of God in Jesus Christ and of neighbour by resisting injustice and untruth? It is not important what we as the WCC, the central committee and the staff in Geneva do and say on behalf of the churches, but what our churches in each specific context are able to do because of us – that is what we must aim for.

26. We must also make the pilgrimage more invitational and inspiring for young people and women. First let me talk about young people. Youth are in the forefront of many creative endeavours today all over the world, leading movements and organizations. Governments, political parties, corporate houses and even reactionary forces are recruiting and relying on youth power and imagination. I do not recommend that we too must abuse or indoctrinate our young people like the way these do. But we must remember that it was the student and youth movements that were at the heart of the formation of the ecumenical movement through the World Student Christian Federation (WSCF), the Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA) and the Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA). The missionary movement that began in 1910 too was a young people's movement. They are the lifeline and the root of the ecumenical movement and the church. Unfortunately, they do not seem to find our ecumenical institutions and churches sensitive to their questions, aspirations and imaginations, or capable of inspiring their creative energy. Perhaps our spaces are too overwhelmed with issues of institutional management, ecclesiastical traditions, and protocols. We have often said that the WCC and our churches will be open to young people but have done very little to create the space for them. Likewise, we must realize that women are in the forefront of many progressive movements for justice, peace and freedom in many parts of the world. We have not only been inconsistent in our solidarity with women in their struggles for dignity, equity, justice and participation but also failed to recognize their capacities to persist in the struggles for justice and peace. Let me commend the Pan-African Women of Faith, which has just concluded its international consultation in Washington, DC, for taking it upon themselves to lift their voices and votes to end hunger and poverty as they advocate for the spiritually, socially and materially marginalized and seek to influence leaders at national, regional, and international levels to promulgate and implement policies that are pro-poor and strengthen commitment to women's leadership. We must realize that our young people and women have the creative capacities and moral stamina to lead us forward in new pathways. Pilgrimage offers an excellent opportunity to rely on these resources not only in our search for justice and peace but also for more creative and credible expressions of ecumenism that are more organic than cerebral, and more people-based than institutional.

27. Justice and peace are not the sole concerns of Christians and churches. Let me reiterate that there are many others along the way, in fact, ahead of us. Should we not partner with them or at least strengthen partnership with them? There was a moment in the life of the WCC that was rich with the fresh insights and challenges that social movements brought and that enriched the meaning and purpose of the ecumenical movement. In fact, their resources of studies, analysis and participation helped the WCC to get engaged in the historic struggles for justice, freedom and human rights in South Africa, Latin America and elsewhere and earned it the global reputation as a credible voice of the voiceless. We affirm that the church is a community of believers and a communion of all God's people involved in the mission of heralding God's reign. There are so many, some right within our churches, who are actively engaged in the struggles for justice and peace in many places. I hope that this pilgrimage will help us open the space for them and reclaim this partnership.

Partnership for justice and peace as partnership with God

28. In closing, let me reiterate that the pilgrimage offers us immense possibilities to reimagine ourselves as a movement of God's people in the mission – open and inclusive, and agile and receptive to the promptings of the Spirit. We have affirmed time and again that the church is a people's movement and that the Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace will also engage people of other faiths and men and women of good will. Let us reclaim and rebuild our capacity for discourse. There is room in the gospel for disagreement, but there is no room for disengagement. As we walk together we should be mindful that even under normal processes of walks or journeys, people will stop, greet, join the walk for a while and some may branch off as you continue toward the destination. Let us walk together, with those who are denied justice, with people of all living faiths, movements, and all others who are striving for justice and peace, kindling hope through creative alternatives, speaking truth to powers and holding them accountable, so that in this partnership for justice and peace we may find ourselves working with our God of life. God of life, lead us to justice and peace.