**NIFEA Workshop on**

**Just Taxation and Reparations**

**16-20 March 2019 (arrival on 16th and departure on 20th), Durban, South Africa**

**Concept and Provisional Programme**

**Background and rationale:**

The 3rd meeting of the Ecumenical Panel on a New International Financial and Economic Architecture (NIFEA) – a panel of experts in theology and economics convened by the World Council of Churches, World Communion of Reformed Churches, Council for World Mission and the Lutheran World Federation – held in New York from 21 to 22 April 2018 underlined two critical consequences of the current financial and economic system: the widening wealth gap and climate change.

“Since the 2008 crisis, socio-economic divides have widened significantly in all countries, whether “developed” or “developing”. Indeed, wealth concentration today is at its highest level since the 19th century. Harsh austerity measures in response to the crisis and the overall failure of the prevailing financial framework to deliver on its promise of generating shared prosperity are helping create the conditions for the rising extremism, protectionism, racism and xenophobia …Threats of war are shaping many financial policies, expanding military budgets in many countries, and preventing spending on public health, education and social care.

In an era of financialization, food and land have become an “asset class”, spurring land grabs and displacing indigenous and other communities from their sources of sustenance. This intersects with the impact of climate change which is driving people from their lands as well as threatening food and water security…Our planet is well on its way to 3-4 degree Celsius warming with devastating consequences on the poorest, and threatening species extinctions in many environments.

Governments have responded to these myriad, yet interconnected challenges through the adoption of the Sustainable Development Goals in 2015. However, the capacity of governments to raise finance to meet these goals is undermined by systemic tax evasion and policies fuelling a competitive race to the bottom. Increasingly market-based instruments and private finance are being called to fill in the gaps, forgetful of the role these played in the crisis. Mechanisms to hold

big finance accountable for the impacts of their operations remain flimsy. Worse, financial regulations put in place after the crisis have been scaled back – indicative of “regulatory capture” by powerful financial lobbies.”[[1]](#footnote-1)

From the foregoing analysis of the “signs of the times”, at least two important areas of faith-based engagement emerge:

**Taxation as a tool for promoting redistribution, accountability and sustainability**

Taxation is an important tool for sharing wealth equitably within and across countries as well as for holding corporations and citizens accountable for their responsibility towards upholding the common good, including care for the global ecological commons. Churches’ NIFEA initiative ought to continue to encourage and support churches in calling for national and international systems of taxation that: reward work and redistribute gains, promote gender justice and ecological sustainability, and penalise “public bads” such as speculative, polluting and resource-depleting activities. These systems would include, among others: progressive taxes, tax relief for the poor and for ecologically-nurturing activities, capital gains and other wealth taxes, financial transaction taxes, carbon taxes, the elimination of tax havens, country-by-country reporting of profits and taxes, unitary methods of corporate taxation and the creation of a global tax body under aegis of the United Nations (UN).

**Reparations for social and ecological debts, especially for the legacies of slavery**

The Transatlantic Slave Trade, which forcibly removed up to 15 million people from Africa, had destructive consequences on the region’s economic production, social life, and ecological fabric, while enriching western, colonial powers. Financial institutions such as JP Morgan Chase, Lehman Brothers, Barclays, AIG, and Aetna have their origins in the trade. A number of nations, movements and churches have called for reparations as an important mechanism for redressing the historical injustices of slavery and the ongoing systematic economic inequalities that are the legacies of slavery today. Climate-related costs are mounting, especially affecting small island states in the Caribbean and the Pacific as well as many parts of Asia, Africa and Latin America. The principles of climate justice demand that these costs are not borne by those who contribute least to greenhouse gas emissions as well as possess scant resources to mitigate, adapt and build resilience to climate change. Churches have therefore called for the transfer of resources from affluent nations to impoverished ones as well as for debt cancellation as reparations for irreversible loss and damage arising from a warming climate. Further work is needed to explore how the struggle for reparations linked to climate change, slavery and racism could be part of the NIFEA vision of economic justice.

**Objectives:**

Against this background, the workshop aims:

* To deepen churches’ understanding of tax justice and reparations as a means to tackle worsening socio-economic inequalities and ecological challenges, not least climate change
* To share, exchange and learn from church engagement and initiatives from around the world to promote just taxation and reparations
* To develop a joint ecumenical campaign or action on just taxation and reparations

**Output:**

The consultation will develop an ecumenical campaign to stimulate church actions for tax justice and reparations.

**Participants:**

The consultation will bring together around 20-25 church people and experts from around the world working for tax justice and reparations as well as voices of those from communities affected by cuts in social spending, climate change and continuing legacies of slavery.

**Provisional programme:**

17 March 2019

08.30 – 09.00 Worship (theme: tax justice)

09.00 – 09.30 Welcome, introductions and expectations

09.30 – 10.30 Theological reflection on tax justice

10.30 – 11.00 Coffee/tea break

11.00 – 12.00 Theological reflection on reparations

12.00 – 12.30 Group discussion

12.30 – 14.00 Lunch

14.00 – 15.30 Panel presentations: Tax justice as a tool for promoting equity, accountability and ecological sustainability

15.30 – 16.00 Coffee/tea break

16.00 – 17.30 Panel presentations: Faith-based initiatives for tax justice

18March 2019

08.30 – 09.00 Worship (theme: reparations for social and ecological debts)

09.00 – 10.30 Panel presentations: Reparations as a means to redress social and ecological debts

10.30 – 11.00 Coffee/tea break

11.00 – 12.30 Panel presentations: Faith-based initiatives calling for reparations

12.30 – 13.00 Lunch

13.00 – 18.00 Immersion visit

19 March 2019

08.30 – 10.30 Group work: building a campaign for tax justice and reparations

10.30 – 11.00 Coffee/tea break

11.00 – 12.30 Group work: building a campaign for tax justice and reparations

12.30 – 14.00 Lunch

14.00 – 16.00 Presentation and discussion: an ecumenical campaign for tax justice and reparations

16.00 – 16.30 Coffee/tea break

16.30 – 17.30 Closing worship and celebration (theme: justice in the economy and the Earth)

**Further steps:**

The campaign will be launched at the UN High-level Political Forum on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (July 2019 in New York) which will review SDG 10 on reducing inequalities and SDG 13 on climate action.

1. See <https://www.oikoumene.org/en/resources/documents/other-ecumenical-bodies/message-on-the-occasion-of-the-3rd-united-nations-un-financing-for-development-forum-by-wcc-wcrc-cwm-and-lwf-new-york-23-26-april-2018>. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)