

*World Council of Churches
Federation of Swiss Protestant Churches
Reformed Churches Bern-Jura-Solothurn*

**Palestine Israel Ecumenical Forum (PIEF)
INTERNATIONAL THEOLOGICAL CONFERENCE
“Promised Land”**

**Church Center Bürenpark, Bern, Switzerland
10 - 14 September 2008**

**The Commitment of the Church to the Quest of a Just Peace
An Asian Perspective**

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Asian peoples know how it feels, and in many cases how much it hurts, to hear other people talking about their affairs. In the age of colonialism almost everything was decided for us in closed sessions to which Asians themselves had no access. In many regions the church is still regarded as an import from the West. Nevertheless, in the past century, it was the church that stood with the suffering, the needy, the crying, the outcast, the marginalized, the grassroots. There the church discovered a place to stand together, to cry together, to live and fight together.

It was not theological reflection that drove the church and faithful people to live in solidarity with those who were suffering. That came later. Emerging issues were interpreted theologically, in what we can call “contextual theology”. Doing theology through the eyes of those who are oppressed and deprived of all their basic rights, through the experience of those who are thirsty and need to drink from the liberating words of the Bible, grounded our way of understanding and practising theology and meditation.

A specific North-East-Asian term for harmony means that “everyone gets the fruit of the earth into their mouth” (☐). Combined with “balance” or “equal” (☐), it means peace. That this meaning underwent a devastating distortion during the Japanese imperial age is well known.

Asia is irreducibly complex and diverse. Any attempt to impose uniformity on this diversity has failed. Especially alive in the memory of Asia is the second world war—the horrifying greater East Asian war, presented as an act of liberation, in which Japanese imperialism attempted to create the “greater East Asian coprosperity sphere”. On the other hand, the experience of Christianity brought to Asia in most cases by colonialism taught us that Christianity by itself is not *the* answer for a proper life. Can Christianity claim to have done more than other faiths to promote justice and peace? Can any other religion claim to have done more?

In many meetings, when Asian people are confronted with the other, it hurts. It hurts to see the perpetrators or to be confronted by the victims—even if those who meet are not themselves the direct perpetrators and victims. Even where it was many decades ago, we remember the deeds (especially the misdeeds) of the other and cry for vengeance.

In many cases, it is painful for both sides when the church calls them together. Because too often the church itself has actively collaborated in injustice or passed by on the other side. It has been a detached bystander or a disengaged and remote observer. Meeting and standing in solidarity with

those who are suffering takes the church down a step: from the role of a mediator on the platform to that of one of the protagonists on the floor. Only in this way can the church communicate with a wider constituency and help them (and itself) find better solutions towards justice and peace.

Asia is still struggling with injustice, poverty, violation of human rights, and corruption. Can this be an excuse to stay far away from other conflicts? Can this be an excuse for just looking at what is happening in the Middle East, in Latin America, in Africa, and doing nothing? To be in solidarity, to pray and work together, cannot be an option to be postponed until our own problems are solved.

An ecumenical solidarity of fighting and standing together in Asia is still working towards justice and peace. I call for a stronger ecumenical solidarity for the Middle East, where our brothers and sisters are suffering from incredible crimes sanctified by the scripture we all share—a forum to provide a space of vulnerability for healing and reconciliation, so that we all can share the fruit of the earth, each in our own vineyard.