

**Report of the URM GLOBAL MISSION CONFERENCE
ABOKOBI, ACCRA, GHANA
1-7 MAY, 2004**

Part 1: Introduction and Core Reflections

Introduction

The Urban Rural Mission conference on “Mission from the Perspective of People in Struggle” was the culmination of a two and a half year process of grassroots missiological reflection initiated by the URM Global Working Group in its meeting in Jacarei, Sao Paulo, Brazil, February/March 2002. It was carried out by the regional networks of URM in Africa, Asia, Europe, Latin America, Middle East and North America. In most cases reflection was done at the local community level, the national level and the regional level. In all cases reports were produced that summarised the key insights of the reflections.

The conference at Abokobi in Accra gathered more than eighty participants from 36 countries and seven of the eight regions of the WCC. There were no participants from the Pacific.

Both the conference and the preparatory process leading to it were designed to achieve two main goals. One was to articulate a vision for mission, from the perspective of people in struggle, that would shape the work and perspective of URM for the years ahead. The other was to bring forward an articulation of that vision of mission to the WCC World Mission Conference in Athens in 2005. This two-pronged concern shaped the discussions and focus of our conference.

The conference was designed to allow these two goals to inform an open-ended process that would permit the conference participants to shape the conversation and also let ideas and concerns inform the discussion as they arose. In order to facilitate this process a series of smaller group discussions were scheduled that would require reporting back to plenary, and were guided by the insights of an appointed group of listeners. This group, chaired by Rev. Dr George Mathew, consisted of representatives from each of the regions. The other members were Mr Mario Gonzales Figueroa (Latin America, with translation assistance from Ms Maria Bentancur Paez), Ms Helena Hooper (Africa), Ms Anna Marisana (Asia), Rev. Garnet Parris (Europe), Dr Daniel Scott (North America), and Mr Gamal Zekrie (Middle East). The task of the Listeners Group was

to listen and note the issues and concerns being raised during the events of the conference, to summarise and reflect on the content of the discussion as a guide to the next steps in the process, and to help gather the insights and results of the discussions.

This report is a synthesis of the core reflections of the Accra conference. It is compiled and prepared from the common report of the group of listeners/reflectors at the conference and some of the common threads from the reports of the regional processes.

The conference was preceded by two days of exposure to the local context. The first was to the old slave castle of Cape Coast, where participants were given a guided tour that helped to immerse them into that part of the history and heritage of the region and the church. The second was to two selected villages involved in a special pilot programme of URM-Africa.

The first day's work was devoted to the formal opening ceremonies, including an opening worship and two opening reflections followed by a plenary discussion. The sermon in the opening worship was preached by His Grace Robert Okine, the retired Archbishop of the Church of the Province of West Africa of the Anglican Communion. The General Secretary of the Christian Council of Ghana, Dr Fred Deegbe, chaired the opening ceremony. Ms Justice Sophia Adenyira, a Vice Moderator of the Central Committee of the WCC and a Ghanaian Appeals Court Judge, gave the welcome and opening address on behalf of the nation and the WCC. Greetings were also received from the churches in Ghana and the Fellowship of Christian Councils and Churches in West Africa (FECCIWA). There were two opening reflections. Ms Anna Marsiana, Director of the Social Welfare Guidance Foundation (YBKS) in Solo, Indonesia, gave a presentation on "Doing mission with people in struggle amidst globalisation." Dr Guillermo Kerber Mas of the WCC International Relations team gave another on "Addressing some global challenges and threats in the dawn of a new century."

The second day was devoted to the process of the "story circles" traditional to North America's first nations communities. It began with an introduction by Ms Bibiana Nalwiindi Seaborn and Dr Daniel Scott, followed by seven simultaneous story circles each with facilitators and theological reflectors. Mr Ron Tremblay closed the "story circles" with a First Nations' traditional ceremony. This was followed by four workshops: Popular Communications, led by Ms Amparo Beltran Acosta; Healing and Balance, led by Mr Ron Tremblay; the Middle East Situation, led by several in the Middle East delegation; and Trafficking in Women, led by Ms Virginia Wangare Greiner. Additionally, URM Asia and Africa met to discuss Asia-Africa Solidarity¹.

The third and fourth days' work each began with worship and small group Bible reflection using the *Lectio Divina* style. These were followed by a plenary during which the listeners presented a commented summary of the previous days' work and raised issues for further reflection by the conference. The process enabled the conference to focus its reflection around four areas, guided by sets of questions for each area.

Core Reflections

a) URM, The Church, and Mission

A clear element in the evolution of the WCC-URM programme is the development of a network that has closely identified itself with this programme. Over the years this network has come to understand itself as a global movement of people, rooted in the Christian faith, who are called, along with others, to the mission of God in a particular way. It has understood this as a call to participate in the struggles of the exploited, the marginalised and the oppressed, for the building of a new community based on justice and inclusiveness, in the perspective of the reign of God.

In light of this self-understanding, URM finds itself faced with some complex and difficult questions and realities regarding its experience of “the church” as institution and its relationship with that institution. URM acknowledges that this relationship has often been characterised by a certain “discomfort” that seems to have become a permanent though not altogether unhealthy aspect of the relationship.

From the midst of struggles there have been different experiences of the institutional manifestation of the “church”. In history there have been positive experiences of “the church” standing side by side with the oppressed and the excluded. However, the predominant experience has been of a church that has either ignored or co-operated in the exclusion of the wounded and marginalised.

URM understands that the church, as the “body of Christ,” is called to be “in the midst” – a living presence of God among all of God’s people. Often this means that the church must live and witness in the complex reality of a multicultural and multi-religious world and face a multiplicity of choices and options in keeping faith with Christ. From the perspectives of the marginalised, however, this is above all a call to a life-giving and life-transforming presence among and alongside people in struggle and in pain. It is a call for participation in their struggle to overthrow the structures and systems that fragment human community, making some oppressors and keeping others oppressed.

URM interprets its own mission in the light of this understanding and thus often finds itself confronting and criticising the churches for not clearly taking sides in favour of the weak. In this way URM finds its own place “in between” the churches and the poor, working *in and on behalf of* the churches as well as of the poor - a prophetic voice of the one to the other. It is clearly not a position of neutrality, but one of mediation and commitment to those on the margins. This makes for a relationship that is both complementary and contradictory, characterised by solidarity and critique. URM acknowledges that its mission is not without the church even if it sometimes has to work outside the structures of the churches. However, from time to time it has to challenge the churches to be with the people in struggle and not to abandon the people in the face of pressure, political interference or other forces opposed to life.

We were aware in raising these issues that we would need to struggle with what we mean by “church” and to acknowledge that local and regional circumstances and experiences will shape our understanding and relationships. And finally we acknowledged that in some regions this dialogue is one that must be inter-faith as much as it is ecumenical.

The conference reflected on the relationship between URM as a movement trying to do mission from the perspectives of people in struggle, on the one hand, and the church as an “institution” in its various manifestations on the other. It affirmed the need for such reflection to be an on-going process both within URM and with the churches. In this relationship, URM sees its role as educative. This is understood as a process of keeping the churches informed and aware of the concerns and perspectives of the poor and marginalised and their struggles for life with dignity, as well as of the issues that debilitate peoples and communities. In this concern to give voice to the perspectives of the excluded, URM has often been critical of the hierarchical structures of the church, challenging the churches to widen their understanding and practice of mission. URM, however, sees itself as acting in a positive way to support and encourage the churches to pay attention to the missiological and evangelical dimensions of issues of justice, poverty and human dignity. Its goal is to influence the churches towards a

vision of mission that includes greater solidarity with the poor and a willingness to be with them in the midst of their struggle.

It must also be said that in many traditions, evangelism and spirituality have been stripped of their essential prophetic character and dimension, as they are often opposed to the struggles of people for justice and life with dignity. The separation of the churches' work for justice from that of proclamation introduces a certain hierarchy of values that in itself often becomes a cause for division in churches and congregations. From the perspectives of people in struggle, this dichotomy promotes a false spirituality that enables evangelism to serve the interests of power and maintain the *status quo*. For them, the integrity of the gospel as "good news to the poor" is what is at stake. True evangelism is the preaching of a gospel that identifies the church with the poor and downtrodden, a gospel that tears down the barriers which divide and separate humanity from God, from each other and from the rest of creation. This calls for a need to refocus evangelism on the reconciling mission of God which denounces all that separate, marginalise and oppress, as exemplified in the life and teaching of Christ. This also means a need to re-place the church's work for social justice within the framework of the proclamation of this reconciling mission of God.

As people involved with this mission, we see ourselves working with the churches in a partnership in which there is mutual need to enable the gospel to find expression in many forms. We see the role of URM as a voice calling the church to prophetic evangelism and to a spirituality of resistance to dehumanisation. This means being alert and ready to address issues that affect the most marginalised: migrants and refugees, victims of all forms of discrimination, oppression, conflict and other forms of violence, and all those whose rights and freedom are at risk or are being violated, as well as issues relating to the concern for and care of the whole earth and all its creatures and resources. We see URM as a prophetic instrument of the church that calls the church to see, understand and stand alongside peoples in struggle. The churches need to be constantly reminded of this call and we need the support of the churches to continue to be in the world in the midst of people's struggles. As URM serves to be the church with people in struggle it also serves as a means for the voices of the poor to be heard and acknowledged in the church. Our tradition of story telling is part of making known the realities of poverty and marginalisation. It is also one of our methods of building and developing inclusive communities. Our hope is that the voices of the poor will be heard and the practice and thinking of mission will be shaped by their insights.

In the face of globalisation we recognise that there are more poor and marginalised than ever before. The gap between the rich and the poor is growing and we feel it is urgent for the church to devote more of its mission resources to accompanying and supporting the poor in their struggle. Resources are needed for training and community mobilisation, and for community building and development. There is a need to build new alliances across ecumenical and inter-faith lines. We need to acknowledge that this work will take many forms in response to local circumstances and realities and that it can only be effective when it is rooted in the particular of local situations, addressing local concerns and reflecting the call of Isaiah 58.

It is recommended that the process that URM follows in dealing with communities and the problems they face be in a continuous state of reforming and refocusing. This includes increased sensitivity in exposure visits and giving space for actions arising from such visits rather than being focused on diagnosing the problems witnessed. We have to continually seek ways to give more space to the grassroots to be much more active in the process of taking

decisions and dealing with problems, including giving them a role in both the meetings and activities of URM and the larger church communities.

b) Violence and Violation and the URM Response

It was clear that a concern for “mission from the perspective of people in struggle” will require a response to the various forms of violence and violation that are part of the experience of people in struggle. Mission as we in URM understand it, as a practice of accompaniment, demands a thoughtful response to the challenges posed by the reality of globalised violence that reduces people to hopelessness. This response must address particularly the issue of mission to the victims of violence and violation in a way that is consistent with the gospel of Christ who brings life in all its fullness to all. Among other concerns, the following need to be addressed:

In the discussions of the church being "in between" there are also questions about mission in relation to the perpetrators of violence, and our role in the work for justice, but also in healing and reconciliation. How is this mission to be carried out? To address violence in its many forms and help devise "strategies of resistance" requires a thoughtful and critical analysis of contexts and circumstances. It also requires spiritual discernment and a reliance on the guidance of the Holy Spirit so that accompaniment is not misplaced or misdirected as in the case of Job's comforters. Finally, we heard a concern to address violation as one of the many forms that violence can take and that can persist in the lives of the marginalised. This also calls for standing with and alongside those who are struggling and those who are marginalised.

In responding to these concerns and challenges we want to strongly affirm the need to do mission “in between” without being misled into a position of neutrality or indifference. We see the church’s mission as a call to “accompaniment” and not “neutral observation”. We have to make sure we are first and always on the side of the victims, but when it is possible we have to be able to work with the perpetrators/violators in order to bring about justice and reconciliation. Violence is a persistent challenge to the church and the gospel, and must not be ignored, dismissed or minimalised.

We acknowledge that in our work for social justice, it is important that we move from the purely juridical and political understanding of justice and reconciliation that has often been associated with peoples’ struggles. We believe that for URM and the church the work of reconciliation cannot be merely to heal the past. It must include the necessary prevention of the repetition of the same wrongs in the future. Repentance requires a change of direction: a turning away. While our priority is to accompany the victims of violence and injustice, perpetrators who are willing to change can become companions in the dialogue and search for reconciliation. We must maintain this hope. In taking sides we want to be clear that we are calling the churches to take the side of justice and of the weak, in the understanding and conviction that the social and political problems that must be addressed have deep theological, ethical and therefore evangelical dimensions. We must be wise to avoid entanglement in political games and hold on to a prophetic role that challenges political, social, economic as well as religious structures that compromise the fullness of life in the perspective of the “good news” of Christ.

There is a persistent temptation to speak on behalf of the victim. URM must be clear that our role is more to create spaces and possibilities for the victims to speak on their own behalf.

Consequently we strongly recommend that the WCC provide such an opportunity and create spaces at the world mission conference for the people in struggle, the victims of violence, the marginalised and afflicted to be and speak for themselves.

From the beginning URM has included people of other faiths within the movement which has presented some challenges to our sense of Christian identity, making it seem less clear. We believe that we are called to be the salt that preserves and gives taste, and that we are not losing our Christian identity but finding our true identity in giving life to others. We insist on the spiritual power of our mission and the hope present in building communities and linking peoples of different backgrounds, especially in contexts where dialogue across traditions is critical for reconciliation, justice and peace building. We see this capacity as nourishing others and ourselves and encourage URM to continue in this spirit.

We are also concerned that URM examine its practices of exposure visits and be aware of the potential of an exposed community being viewed and not engaged. It is important that any visit to a community be an act of solidarity and that any visit has an objective for that visit. We encourage a shift from exposure to immersion so that the visit achieves bonding, understanding and provides exchanges of stories and experiences.

c) Restorative Justice, Healing and Reconciliation

Authentic reconciliation must be based on justice and truth that deals with the root causes of conflict, violence and violation. Among people in struggle, there is serious concern that the discourse on healing and reconciliation would not take seriously the concerns for justice. This is because the powerful and the perpetrators of injustices often talk about reconciliation and not about justice. For people in struggle, “restorative justice” remains one of the critical tasks – the unfinished business – for mission. This raises the question: What is the nature of the restorative justice that we seek and what are the necessary steps in moving to and beyond it to true healing and reconciliation?

The call for the churches to become reconciling and healing communities is also a call for them to recognise the brokenness of the world in which they are called to witness and minister. It is a call to recognise that the world is broken and continues to be broken through a persistent abuse of power, the marginalisation and oppression of the weak and the de-humanisation of the other. Human history is replete with instances of genocide and other crimes against humanity. Some of these have caused the disappearance of whole peoples and cultures. Those of the last and present centuries are sombre reminders of this reality. Impunity and regimes and rules of terror are a part of our recent memory. We continue to witness violent civil, ethnic and religious conflicts. Violent dispossessions, transplantsations, occupations, old and new forms of economic and social marginalisation and victimisation, and the kind of violent resistance that these have elicited have thrown the world into a new era of polarisation that all sides see as a threat to their way of life. In dealing with this threat, the concerns for national and international security have shaped policy and response. Thus the powerful have seized the opportunity to entrench their self-interest. In this approach, there seems to be a blurring, on both sides, of the distinction between might and right, between self-defence and aggression, between resistance and terrorism, justice and the terror of “counter-terrorism.”

These have all continued to contribute to the fragmentation of human communities creating a broken world full of people with shattered self-worth. It is this human condition itself that

most needs healing. In this condition should be seen the real challenges to the gospel as “good news” to all, and it is in this perspective that “repentance”, “restitution”, “forgiveness” and “the healing of memories” become critical to mission as it works for humanity and creation reconciled to itself and to God.

We need to recognise the de-humanisation of the human condition in these acts of human beings against one another, but we also need to understand that de-humanisation is a two-edged sword, a two-way process in which both the victim and the perpetrator are de-humanised. Our work for restorative justice is thus work towards re-humanisation. While there cannot be restoration to a kind of primordial perfection, there can be a restoration of humanity through the recognition of one’s humanity in the other. This also requires repentance and a change of attitudes.

Here we caution against a purely anthropomorphic understanding of humanisation. We affirm that it is the image of God in each that makes a human being. Our de-humanisation of each other is our refusal to see this image in each other. It also is our deliberate attempt to deny the others their potential to see God’s image in themselves and to attain that potential. It is important that our work for humanisation has this spiritual dimension that moves us beyond an anthropocentric humanity to a God-filled one - to *theosis* or deification. This is a never-ending process of becoming, of growing in and into God.

We assert that such kind of restoration is essential for true healing, as no healing or reconciliation can take place if the injustices of marginalisation, discrimination, exploitation and abuse of power persist. Justice and reconciliation must be seen to be complimentary in God’s mission. It is God who heals and reconciles us to each other and to Godself in Christ. In him we are reconciled to God in the re-creative power of the Holy Spirit. We are reminded that this also is a never-ending process that requires spiritual vigilance. The prophetic voice of the church must be raised at all times against all tendencies to dehumanise or perpetuate human brokenness, if she is truly to participate in this mission of God.

There needs to be a critical assessment of recent more juridical approaches to restorative justice that have focussed on material restitution. Does this form of restorative justice lead to healing and reconciliation? This is important because restorative justice cannot be an end in itself. It must lead to healing, the healing of people and communities.

In our reflections on healing and reconciliation we realise again that we are called to take the side of the victim, even as we work for a community based approach. Thus we must take care that the work to restore and heal the brokenness and fragmentation of community does not hurt or victimise the victims any further, or create more victims for that matter.

d) Globalization and the Commodification of Life

The stories of peoples’ struggles highlighted a concern about globalisation and the capacity of its ideology and accompanying legal practices to turn all things — resources, water, human beings — into commodities to be bought, sold, seized or exchanged for the benefit and profit of a limited few. It does not seem clear that the churches have grasped the full import of this ideology and the challenges that its claims pose to the gospel that we are commissioned to proclaim. URM is concerned that the good work of social analyses is yet to be matched by a theological critique that exposes globalisation for what it is, and the challenges that it poses for the gospel of Christ. It is important that URM engages the churches to reflect on and

articulate a theological response to the ideology of commodification that drives globalisation. It is essential that the churches are enabled to engage both their rich and poor to understand and challenge the idolatry of this ideology, and resist its ability to fragment and destroy life, including all forms of human community and the natural order.

URM believes that its mission is to denounce this trend and its effects on the lives of people and communities, but also to encourage the development of alternatives at the concrete level of community building. Also in the face of the disappearance of the ideological debate, the world seems caught between the neo-liberal theses that drives a global mono-culture, and a growing exclusivist nationalistic and ethnicist vision. URM asserts the need for a counter-ideology discourse, and the need to be proactive in this regard.

In the creation stories of Genesis and the cosmologies of other religious and cultural traditions, we recognise that the Spirit works to create life in every circumstance. God's breath/spirit turns dust into being and the same Spirit creates order out of chaos. The coming of Christ is God's response to humanity leading creation back into brokenness, into chaos, through its death dealing acts of disobedience and de-humanisation. In Christ God calls us out of this brokenness into wholeness; through Christ's death and resurrection, God calls us out of death into life, restoring us, in the power of the Spirit, to a humanity centred once again in God. We therefore see our call to participate in this mission of God as an invitation to the feast of life in which all people are being re-humanised, in which order is being re-created and life is being restored to its fullness and its wholeness. We see the commodification of life as the perpetuation of de-humanisation and of creation's brokenness - a denial of God's saving act and power in Christ. And we call the churches to resist this.

We assert that the poor, especially, should have easy access to the essentials of life such as land, food and water, and to the services that support life, such as education and health care, as basic human rights, and we condemn the commodification of these and other life-related human activities such as culture and the environment. Thus we believe that there is need to defend some of the social achievements of the past and for resistance against the total dismantling of those social security systems that have resulted from peoples' struggles.

Instead of the survival of the fittest, we affirm, in response to the call of the gospel, a spirituality of commitment to the most vulnerable, to "the least of [those] who are members of [God's] family" (Matt. 25: 40). Instead of the sacredness of wealth, we affirm the sacredness of God-given life, characterised by grace, gratuity, generosity and hospitality. We call for resistance to the deification of money. We confess God as the only source of all life and being, and affirm the goal of mission as the deification (*theosis*) of humanity, empowered by the Holy Spirit to participate in Christ and in Christ's mission of salvation and reconciliation to God and to one another. We affirm the sharing of material goods and spiritual gifts and potential, as an essential aspect of this mission, as portrayed in Matthew 25. We believe that values based on the gospel must inspire state regulations to limit the absoluteness of the free market, and that this is an important part of the prophetic mission of the church.

Globalisation, however, must not be seen only for its economic impact on the poor and on human community. There is serious concern that new forms of identity, relationships and relatedness are, in this era of globalisation, being forced on whole populations and peoples. This is being done both in people's own traditional contexts, through a systematic and intentional process of cultural imperialism, or, in new contexts where people have been uprooted, through policies and processes of assimilation. These tend to perpetuate and

reinforce the cultural genocide that has now so clearly been identified as one of the negative consequences of the way in which mission was done in the past. This trend towards an imposed global mono-culture and a singular or “melting-pot” identity that allows little diversity poses as much a threat as any to the integrity of God’s creation, and a challenge to mission. This is not new either. Throughout human history, and especially in the past half millennium, the arrogance of one civilisation or another has led to the genocide of others and significant losses to humanity. True reconciliation requires facing and challenging such tendencies, be they in policies or people’s behaviour. It requires new ways of preaching and living the gospel today that enable people to recover value in themselves and in their own identities, as these interact with others and grow.

Therefore:

We will need to articulate a theology of wealth that respects the spiritual disciplines and practices of Isaiah 58 so that we can maintain our hope for abundant life while being able to critique a theology of prosperity. We recommend this a task for the mission conference, and to future mission work in the ecumenical movement. Our work in mission will also require us to call the rich to repentance and admission of culpability. The rich are all those who have responsibility, who use/abuse resources for their own ends, who have power over others. We will need to consider limits to wealth. We are concerned for the need to reclaim words, concepts and ideas that have been hijacked to serve ends other than justice. We see the basis of justice as the work of the Spirit. Our work, if we are to move ahead, will require us to create alternatives of several kinds:

— Sharing and communicating practical alternatives for community building and development and economic and social practices that respect peoples’ legitimate identities, and the participation and well-being of all peoples.

— In our work of accompaniment opening spaces for cooperative discourse on ideology including the possible creation, in the future, of a "URM Institute for Alternative Ideologies".

e) Concluding Statement

Isaiah 58: 1-11 presents the URM movement with a non-negotiable position in our efforts to fulfill ‘mission from the perspective of peoples in struggle’. We see this as having two complimentary aspects. The movement has stressed the following as its praxis in mission, namely, ‘mission from below, giving space for the voiceless to be heard, and accompanying the poor and marginalized in their struggles.’ However, URM is being called to be prophetic in and on behalf of the church which makes its position both complimentary and contradictory.

URM is challenged by a praxis of mission that will lead to healing and reconciliation when this praxis is informed by the challenge of Isaiah 58: 1-11. Our mission will continue to resist seeking our own pleasure and comfort. It will continue to resist oppression of the powerless and the poor and resist neglecting the homeless and the abuse of marginalized communities. Above all else it will resist remaining silent in the face of the silence of the church or her refusal to take the side of the poor and be active in their struggle for re-humanisation and a life with dignity.

Conference Communiqué

We are gathered here in Accra, Ghana from all parts of the world; from Africa, Asia and the Middle East, from Europe and from North America, Latin America and the Caribbean. We have come to renew, reaffirm and strengthen our mission in the midst of people in struggle as URM networks. This comes at a time where institutionalised oppression, systematic violence, occupation and militarization, marginalization, and socio-economic deprivation and exclusion present new challenges to humanity. We note with deep concern processes of illegal occupation and oppression of sovereign lands and peoples under the guise of the ‘war on terror’, citing especially the situation in the Middle East. We are concerned that policies of hegemony, unilateralism, and neo-colonialism, along with their economic capitalist dimensions, are devastating and fragmenting many parts of the world.

We, as the global URM movement, are part of and work with grassroots communities that are committed to working among those in struggle – of whom we are part – for solidarity, for spiritual empowerment, by providing safe space for their stories of struggle to be heard, for the improving of their quality of life by developing alternatives and by actively resisting the powers of oppression and dehumanisation.

We visited Cape Coast and were reminded of the deep historical wounds of slavery that need to heal in Africa and all around the world. We also visited with churches and local communities, hearing their needs, sharing experiences, joys and hopes, and were enriched by the cultural and spiritual heritage of the people of Ghana.

Mission, for us, is the proclamation of the fullness of life. As people from churches, other faith communities, and diverse social movements around the world, as individuals and communities living the struggle, we are called to provide open space through which the voices of pain and suffering are lifted to the church and the community. In story-telling circles we have listened to the stories of communities in struggle and reflected on our social commitment to act on these stories. Through this sharing, we intend to build community in solidarity.

URM mission begins with the stories of the people, stories of liberation from bondage, stories of personal and communal cries of pain, joy and hope, of individual liberation and community emancipation. These story-telling circles were enriched by the wealth of religious and cultural traditions – a richness that is integral to the URM global family.

As we renew our hope for communities that are blessed with ‘life in abundance’, our mission begins with speaking our prophetic voice to expose and condemn the capitalist-led, globalized context and its new geo-political realities that intentionally destroy human community. We specifically examined the effects of violence and its impact on those who are violated; commodification as the catalyst for globalisation; injustice and the need for restorative justice, and the mission of URM as the spirituality of resistance to this injustice and oppression. We affirm the call ‘another world is possible’.

In the midst of this global context, we heed the call to be healing and reconciling communities, believing that truth and faithfulness of the memory of the victims must qualify this healing, and that reconciliation in the context of broken communities is a process that must be informed by justice at all levels. We are living and working in communities where

killing, enslavement, and oppression are taking place daily, and it is our understanding that forcibly silenced cries of pain cannot be overshadowed by the language of pacification. Just, sustainable and lasting interpersonal and inter-communal healing is built on a spirituality of reconciliation that respects the voice of the victims. We have been inspired by words of Isaiah 58 and Luke 4, indicating that mission will lead to healing and reconciliation when it is characterized by a spiritual discipline that resists egoism and oppression and breaks the yoke of injustice.

Our URM mission is based on spiritual empowerment that is life-giving, fulfilling and is a motivating power towards individual and community emancipation from the shackles of economic servitude, political repression, cultural oppression and social marginalization.

Today, as we come from the all around the world, we reaffirm our commitment to working with the poorest of the poor and the most marginalised. We reaffirm our commitment to working with the church and through people's movements in each of our local contexts.

Notes

1 While insights from these processes are reflected in the “Core Reflections” that follow, separate reports on some of these are available on request