

## **Opening Remarks: The Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace by the General Secretary of the World Council of Churches Rev. Dr Olav Fykse Tveit in Sigtuna, 1<sup>st</sup> of December 2014**

### **1. A Movement in Faith**

We are on a Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace. We are in the oneecumenical movement together. We are seeking the visible expression of our unity. In our time, I find that we also are particularly called to find new expressions of our unity in Christian solidarity. This is a solidarity in the cross of Christ, who through the cross and resurrection showed that sin, violence, injustice and death will not have the last words in this world.

Carrying the cross of Christ together, we are called to a solidarity with one another, particularly with those of us (and many of you are here) who represent suffering Christians in many parts of the world. You help all of us to be even more aware of that reality when we speak of the needs for justice and peace, we speak not about them or you, but about us. And as we see one another more closely - as Christian sisters and brothers - it becomes impossible not to see that we are dealing with what is "us" - the one humanity.

We know from the prayer of Jesus (John 17) that our unity never should be for our sake alone. We are called to unity in order to give witness to the world and to serve the world together. The words of the Beatitudes remind us that any longing for justice and peace is given by God and blessed by God (Matthews 5). The Spirit of God enables us as Church and the whole of Creation to cry and pray for redemption, that the righteousness of God must be the fulfilment of justice and that the peace of God will come (Romans 8).

We also see quite clearly in practically all areas of conflicts today that the churches and the Christians are in the same need of peace and justice as others, whether they belong to a religious tradition or identify themselves that way, or not. The Christians cannot be "saved alone". We have to see that quite often many others, people of other faith groups and communities, are in an even worse situation than many Christians. The call to Christian efforts for peace must be expressed in a Christian solidarity with one another as Christians, to serve the needs of all for peace.

Three examples: The need for peace at the Korean peninsula we saw in a very moving and deep sense as we were together with our Christian sisters and brothers in Korea a year ago for the WCC Assembly. The impossibility of being together there as Christians from the North and the South, due to the political realities and lack of a peace agreement, became a clear sign of the peace every Korean needs – in the North and in the South.

The dramatic situation of our Christian sisters and brothers in Syria and Iraq, as we get first-hand information from them here and in other meetings, helps us to understand what kind of sufferings all are undergoing. The WCC Executive committee last week, as we met in

Cyprus, made a statement about the millions of displaced peoples in the Middle East region. They are not all Christians, but through our sisters and brothers we get to know the urgent needs of all people. And the situation calls on the many actors, particularly the big powers, to get together to move a peace process that can end this catastrophe. Some of them also see themselves as states and rulers promoting Christian values. The ordinary people are paying the price with their one health, their livelihoods, their lives, and the future of their children. The churches are there and should be able to continue to be there, to continue to show the Christian solidarity with their people and with all people in need.

Thirdly, as we hear about the constant violence, particularly now against schools and places of worship in Nigeria, we are shocked to see how Christians and churches are affected by this. But we also see how this is affecting and shocking Muslims in the same areas, particularly when they have leaders with the courage to speak up against the violence. We see that the only way forward is how Christians and Muslims together both monitor and counteract the legitimacy of violence, and how together they call for the proper protection of the lives of vulnerable people. As the WCC, we are working together with the churches in Nigeria to find new ways to do this as a joint Christian-Muslim initiative for just peace.

The work for peace is a way to participate in the creation of God. War is always undermining the life God has created and continues to create. God does not only create at the day of our birth. We need to be sustained, through all that is included in the word of Shalom, Salaam, Peace, Fred.

The more I reflect on this theme, the more I am convinced that this pilgrimage is both a way to continue the one ecumenical movement and a way to move forward in our time that opens up new dimensions and new practices than those we have had before. I think anything else would be irresponsible. We have a legacy to learn from and to be continued; however, we also must find and develop new ideas. New insights and expressions are developed by reflecting on this motto of the Pilgrimage, and particularly when we do that in a specific context or as a special dimension of our calling. We also need to develop new tools, patterns, and resources to do this work.

## **2. Why we are *here*. The legacy from Archbishop Nathan Söderblom**

Pilgrimage means for many a journey to a holy place where people of holiness have lived and worked for the holy life of others. There are many ways of expressing this, and we should not develop an ecumenical theology of saints here and now. But we are connected here in Sigtuna and Sweden to the legacy of Archbishop Nathan Söderblom in a way that can inspire us to learn from the past and to find new ways forward.

As the centennial of his consecration as Archbishop of the Church of Sweden happens this year, we are honoured to be here with several of his successors. We are welcomed by the

present Archbishop Antje Jackelén, who has a well-known commitment to justice and peace, showing through his being and his work that a just peace means a just community of women and men. We are here with her predecessor Archbishop emeritus Anders Wejryd, who now serves as the President for Europe in the WCC. We have in our material of preparation a significant text from his predecessor, Archbishop KG Hammar (“Peace is the way to Peace – an outline of a peace theology”).

From his extraordinary life and legacy, I will for this occasion point to three significant dimensions of the life and work of Söderblom.

He firmly believed that the work for peace was at the heart of the Christian calling. To follow Christ is to be a peacemaker. This was also, in his understanding, the real essence and meaning of religion. Even more, this work for peace is both our calling and what we can do. We can make a difference, he firmly believed. That he was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize for his efforts continues to remind us that the churches should and could make significant contributions to a just peace.

Secondly, his vision and his restless efforts to make the churches unite in an organized ecumenical movement, particular through the great meeting of Life and Work in Stockholm 1925, belongs to the origins of what became the World Council of Churches. These initiatives were greatly inspired and supported by the famous encyclical in 1920 from the Ecumenical Patriarch. Together the churches can make much more of a difference to address the world’s needs for justice and peace.

Thirdly, Söderblom prepared the Stockholm conference very carefully as a moment of prayer for peace together. The prayer life of the meeting served as the high points and the moments that carried the meaning and purpose of the whole event. The ecumenical movement is a movement of prayer and spirituality, worshipping the Prince of Peace together and making us open for God’s guidance.

I think you recognize, as I do, that the Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace is based in our roots as ecumenical movement.

### **3. Why we are here – the task before us**

We are here in Sigtuna, in Sweden, on a pilgrimage of justice and peace. This is a proper time and a proper place for our consultation and workshop on peace building and peacemaking. This is what the 10<sup>th</sup> Assembly of the WCC has called for, and this is what we are doing. We bring together one another’s contributions to build a just peace. We are here to share, to discuss, to learn from one another, and to work on how we move forward as one ecumenical movement building and make for justice and peace.

The more specific question of this consultation and the following workshop is: How can the wider work of peace-building be served by initiatives of peace-making, addressing unsolved, violent, and armed conflicts? How must the Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace have clear initiatives and objectives as to how we together can contribute to peace-making? How can we learn from what has been done, and how can we strengthen one another's efforts as Christian peace-makers?

What is the relationship between Just Peace as it is described in the Statement on the Way to Just Peace from the 10<sup>th</sup> Assembly of the WCC, and the just peace that comes at the ends of conflicts?

Some describe this as the relationship between "the positive peace" and "the negative peace". This is also what KG Hammar calls the relationship between "the great peace" (corresponding to the comprehensive definition of "just peace"), and the end of armed conflicts, "the small peace". I do not understand that this is a grading in significance for those who need peace, but a description of how wide is the scope for the definition of "just peace".

This can be described as two dimensions of just peace. This is more than a matter of refining our terminology. There is an important connection between these dimensions, which we are here to elaborate.

Just peace is the peace agreement that is fair, that brings justice as part of the peace agreement and post-war relationships. The great problem after the 1<sup>st</sup> World War, as Nathan Söderblom raised it, was that the peace was not just, there was a lack of just peace in that sense. And the history after that showed he was right. It developed as a new story of conflict and war, even worse than the first in many aspects.

In September, I participated in a centennial marking the beginning of the First World War, in Antwerp, Belgium, one of those areas that became a battlefield and a grave for so many human beings, soldiers and others. War is always a tragedy for the creation of God. The memorial happened in the annual inter-faith prayer for peace organized by the Roman Catholic St Egidio lay movement, a faithful partner to the WCC in our work for Christian unity and peace. The reality that a conflict can be violent, and develop into a war, but also into a World War with great implications on many continents, is a heavy legacy from Europeans of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. Preaching in the Cathedral of Antwerp, together with church leaders from Iraq and Syria, I served as a representative of the ongoing ecumenical commitment of the WCC working for just peace. We are not talking about history only as something to remember, but also from which to learn. Some of the reasons for the breakdown of the nation states and their ability to protect their citizens, in Syria and Iraq, are due to the way that region was divided into those states after the end of the empires and the war.

How are we as churches with our values contributing to the peace processes and the peace negotiations in such a way that the peace that might be established may be seen by most of the parties as just? How can we promote the peoples' voices, how can we speak on behalf of those who pay with their life, their health, their homes, their security, that peace may come and that something may be established that can be seen as justice for the victims of the war? These, and similar questions, are what we are here to address.

I believe it is of high significance that the more comprehensive understanding of just peace has been developed in the last years in the ecumenical movement. These express the holistic perspectives of peace expressed in the term of Shalom/Salaam. In the "Ecumenical Call to Just Peace", also echoed in the Assembly statement on the Way to Just Peace, we find the fourfold just peace: in the community, with the earth, in the marketplace, and peace among the nations. This has been developed in the light of the theme of the 10<sup>th</sup> Assembly and the focus on "God of life". And we are here we are to address the fourth dimension of this quartet.

This question, of the relationship between the wider, later understanding of "Just Peace" and the earlier, the more specific issue of the qualities of the peace agreements and their implementations, is at the heart of our consultation and our workshops here in Sigtuna. In my understanding, there is indeed a very dynamic and essential relationship between the two. And this is what we shall explore together in these days.

The vision required for ending a conflict, particularly when it has become violent or even an armed conflict or a war, any motivation for bringing the devastating and destroying forces to end, should be a dream of something that can be described as a just peace. The need to develop the ideas, but also the vision and the hope for a just peace should be used as a motivation for coming to a peace agreement. Something better, something that makes life possible to thrive and to develop, must be envisioned to motivate a cessation of conflict. At the least, somebody who has such a vision for ordinary people and the care for their lives must bring forward such a vision of a just peace, a shalom, to argue for the end of violence. Violence can only breed more violence; we reap what we sow.

But the work for the wider, the great just peace requires actually that there is a tangible peace, a lack of armed conflict, an end to fighting and abuse, a termination of fear of death and destruction. Peace is actually a condition for being able to build a society, a relationship, a democracy serving the rights and the dignity of all citizens, to ensure human rights etc.

#### **4. The WCC as a hub in an ecumenical network for peacemaking**

Let us speak together in concrete terms about the work we do here these days and what it can lead to in terms of a follow-up.

The historical origins of the World Council of Churches lie in the movement among and the coming together of churches during the period of World War II in order to promote peace between nations and peoples. When the Busan Assembly of the WCC met in October 2013 and declared a “Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace”, it was in many ways bringing the WCC back to its foundational impulse and calling.

This consultation is one of the means by which we are seeking to give further form and content to the Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace, and for determining how we might practically travel together on this journey.

In its Strategic Plan 2015-2017 and in its programme plans for 2015, the WCC has already mapped out initial directions and signposts for the Pilgrimage. Geographically, priority locations for WCC’s work in promoting peace and justice include the Korean Peninsula, Syria and Iraq, Israel-Palestine, Nigeria, the DRC, and South Sudan. We also see that we need to address the situation in Ukraine. And perhaps we together should travel in an ecumenical visit to our sisters and brothers in the USA in order to address racism and racial conflict there?

The stipulated thematic priorities include peace building and conflict resolution, human rights (especially children’s rights, freedom of religion or belief, and the rights of migrants and stateless people), economic justice, climate change, gender equality, and health and healing. There are many initiatives that have already been taken on these priorities since the Busan Assembly. I can mention the inter-faith summit to address climate change in New York in September and last week’s Nairobi consultation on how we address together the Ebola crisis, together with the All Africa Conference of Churches and other African churches and partners.

Most importantly, these different areas of work must not take place in isolated silos, but must mutually inform and influence each other, within the Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace.

The WCC, as a fellowship of churches committed to justice and peace, already constitutes a network for advocacy and action on these issues – for Just Peace. And we have the structures and profile for bringing the international ecumenical community – partners as well as member churches – together in movement and action on this Pilgrimage. Notably, the Commission of the Churches for International Affairs (CCIA) provides a hub through which these various inter-related areas of work can connect and achieve mutual coherence.

We will be sharing together here, and will continue to do so after this conference concludes.

I hope that the outcome of this consultation will be to give life and energy to a deeper active engagement by churches and partner organizations with and through the WCC in advocacy for peace with justice – for Just Peace.

## 5. Will churches moving together help to build peace?

- a. Yes, *if* in moving together to build justice and peace more churches accompany other churches and many more churches advocate together, ecumenically, for specific aspects of the global public good.
- b. Yes, *if* moving together on a pilgrimage of justice and peace means that we advance in different spheres of our common life – social, economic, political, and ecological – addressing the four themes that go into building and nurturing a just peace.
- c. Yes, if churches move deliberately and together to build “Peace among the Peoples”. This is the reason for some current ecumenical successes. The latest step is that the world’s first global Arms Trade Treaty is coming into effect on Christmas Eve. The WCC led churches to help get their governments to ratify the treaty. In the Ecumenical Campaign for a Strong and Effective Arms Trade Treaty a network led by the WCC has been diligent about churches **moving** toward a shared goal that saves lives and protects communities. Our success is grounded in **moving together**.
- d. Yes, if strengthening the rule of law is held as a core strategy for ecumenical peace building, a unifying theme in ecumenical advocacy. As we know, areas of law that are critical to peace include International Humanitarian Law and International Human Rights Law.
- e. Yes, if the main path of the ecumenical pilgrimage towards justice and peace is preventive in character. Preventive work to reduce violence, armed conflict and abuses of human rights holds the most promise for the greatest range of peace-building ministries in the church. Prevention, forgiveness, and reconciliation are truest to who we are in Christ.
- f. Yes, if we build alliances with other religions and cooperate to build peace on firm, shared foundations. These are ecumenical and multi-religious principles calling people of faith;
  - To be engaged in public and international affairs
  - To protect human life and all life
  - To preserve human dignity
  - To safeguard the sanctity of life and the interdependence of all life
  - To exercise collective responsibility for the planet
  - To preserve the planet for future generations
- g. If we live by the broadest tenets of our faith and share those convictions in the words and deeds of peace building, we will bring together the body of Christ in new

ways. This combination of Christian and multi-religious teachings will also be understood by people of other faiths and those who profess no faith;

- All people are made in the image of God
  - God's gracious and unconditional love is for all people
  - All life and creation are previous gifts from God
  - We are prohibited from killing
  - Swords are to be made into ploughshares
  - We are not to learn war anymore
  - We are to love God completely and love our neighbour as we love ourselves.
- h. What will Christians of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century be remembered for? Will it be for giving their children a peaceful and liveable world? Will our faith be known for serving the common good and building a common future? If so, we will have given ourselves for others and given glory to God.

If the pilgrimage is to be known by its fruits, what signs shall we look for?

The pilgrimage will be known mostly for how churches move together, why they are doing so, and whether they are contributing to the common good. Here are some basic signs to look for:

- Collective movement – as women and men, involving youth etc.
- Contributing to external change
- Generation of public benefits
- Evidence of growth in faith and fellowship
- Burden sharing and accountability among member churches
- Cooperation with external partners.

### **Conclusion:**

As churches and Christians, we pray daily for the Kingdom of God to come, for the will of God to be done on earth as it is in heaven. The world with all its overwhelming crises these days needs people of faith who are willing to let their faith be much more than positions of the past or identities that separate us. The world needs people of faith who believe in God and who are willing to move when God calls us to move.