
World Council of Churches
United Nations Advocacy Week
Annex – UNAW 2008

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Our Common Strategic Global Ecumenical Advocacy

I want to begin by remembering Chris Ferguson's brother, Bruce, who died earlier this month. Chris, we give thanks for his life, for his role in your life, and for your leadership in our midst.

I am thankful as well for the way God has worked through the ministries of all who gather for UN Advocacy Week - ministries with migrants, ministries of ecological stewardship, ministries of peace-making - and add my prayer for God's blessing on these days.

We gather at a rather astonishing moment in world history! As the global economic system undergoes major upheaval, can we advocate effectively for a system that pays greater attention to the world's most vulnerable citizens? As political life in the United States undergoes major transition, can we advocate effectively for a U.S. foreign policy that favors diplomacy over force, for a foreign policy that seeks "security" not through unilateral defense but through attentiveness to the injustice that afflicts other children of God? You may recall the wonderful line in Ezekiel where the prophet says that Pharaoh has grown so arrogant that he thinks he invented the Nile - for his own use! Can we lift up our voice on behalf of a U.S. policy which recognizes its more modest place within the community of nations and which affirms that all we have is gift to be used for the common good?

One of the tasks of advocacy, as you all know, is to discern the opportunities inherent in a particular place and time. Things have changed so rapidly in the past two months that, if the agenda for this week had been determined in October, it might have been somewhat different. And yet, our four themes still provide a fine framework for discussing the possibilities of this moment.

As far as advocacy in the U.S. is concerned, we are now facing the prospect - as my colleague at the NCC, Cassandra Carmichael, puts it - of being able to play offense, not just defense. We welcome this change, but it also comes with a real danger: that the churches of the National Council become so caught up in the allure of political influence that we lose our distinctive and more prophetic voice. This, too, is part of our discernment in this moment, and I ask for the prayers of international colleagues as we wrestle with the implications of our changed situation.

Finally, by way of introduction, I want to express my appreciation for the honor of this invitation; but I stand here acutely aware that many (most) of you have more experience than I when it comes to global advocacy. My only possible contribution is to speak from my position as a theologian who now has responsibility for a national council of churches - a council, I should add, that has had real difficulty in recent years getting its act together when it comes to advocacy! So think of this as a case study on one country, with a hope that it also speaks to your varied contexts.

I am going to begin not by defining advocacy (which has been done at some length in various studies) but by clarifying my understanding of what it means to be ecumenical and what it means to be a council of churches. This will tell you a good deal about my particular perspective and also identify two tensions important for our discussion of global advocacy: the tension between unity and justice and the tension between working through the churches and being ahead of the churches. Following that, I will turn

to four other tensions that, as I see it, are central to our advocacy work as the National Council of Churches in the USA.

What so captivated me when I went to work for the World Council of Churches in 1980 was that, in order to do justice to the Council, you had to say “Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry” and Program to Combat Racism in the same breath. Racism, we were arguing, is a denial of the very nature of the church, while the eucharist is the very foundation of the church’s calling to racial justice. I remember Philip Potter speaking about the human problem as both oppression and fragmentation – which is why, in the words of the Nairobi Assembly, we proclaim a savior who “frees and unites.” Break the tension between these and, in my judgment, you have lost the vision that impels this movement. Christians acting and advocating for justice, without major concern for how this deepens and expands the life of Christian community, are not “ecumenical” in any full sense of the word. Just as Christians pursuing sacramental fellowship, without major concern for how this deepens and expands their engagement with the world (their advocacy), are not “ecumenical” in any full sense of the word.

Of course, it has always been difficult to hold these together (that’s what makes the vision profound); but today, at least in the U.S, we witness an increasing split between two quite different ways of being “ecumenical,” two quite different sets of ecumenical priorities – to the point that it is difficult to speak of one movement. In March, hundreds of Christians gather in Washington for Ecumenical Advocacy Days (which the NCC co-sponsors) in order to promote interdenominational collaboration on behalf of peace and justice. In April or May, hundreds of Christians gather somewhere in the U.S. for the National Workshop on Christian Unity (which the NCC helps plan) in order to promote unity through theological dialogue. But my own unscientific survey tells me that very few who participate in one participate in, or even know about, the other.

Three years ago, in The Christian Century, the well-known Lutheran theologian, George Lindbeck, attacked what he called the “MK approach” to ecumenism. Michael Kinnamon, he wrote, tries to make Faith and Order and Life and Work (unity and justice) inseparable, co-equal ends to the ecumenical movement – but it is a futile and misguided effort. Faith and Order must take precedence over Life and Work in the same way that faith takes precedence over works in Reformation teaching. Otherwise, theology will always end up subordinated to politics and the ecumenical movement will become “simply another arena for pursuing political agendas.”

Of course, the jury is still out on whether it is possible to make bold public witness on pressing social, economic issues while also taking full account of the diversity of voices that now make up the theological life of the church, nationally as well as globally. Perhaps, Dr. Lindbeck is correct. But I sure hope not, and I hope we will talk about it – about what it means to be ecumenical – during this week.

All of this leads to the second question: What does it mean to be a council of churches? The very helpful “Review of Global Advocacy” – undertaken by the WCC, the Ecumenical Advocacy Alliance, ACT International, and ACT Development – reads as if the World Council were an entity alongside the churches. The WCC, it says, “...coordinates its member churches around the world to raise their voices,” and accompanies its members in times of trouble.

I believe this is a mistaken formulation. As the “Common Understanding and Vision” statement makes clear, the essence of the WCC is the relationship of the churches with one another. There are countless organizations that provide services, even do advocacy, on behalf of the churches; but these

should not be confused with a council, a fellowship, of the churches themselves. There is no council over here and churches over there. The language we use is that the NCC is a “community of Christian communions” which covenant with one another to manifest the unity that is ours in Christ and, with God’s help, to engage in common mission – which includes political advocacy.

All of this ups the ante, makes it harder to leave the table, since the churches are accountable not to an organization but to one another. It also, however, makes the tension between unity and justice all the more acute. I try to maintain this tension by insisting that the NCC is both a forum where conflicting perspectives meet in dialogue and a renewal effort that boldly declares the gospel’s partisanship on behalf of the excluded and oppressed. Willem Visser’t Hooft, the WCC’s first General Secretary, has given me language for this (although Jose Miguez Bonino also made the case in his discussion, in the late 1980s, of the WCC’s theological coherence). The fellowship between member churches, with all its tensions, wrote Visser’t Hooft in one of his last books, is the *raison d’être* of the Council. “But it is a fellowship based on common convictions and called to common witness. An important element in the very substance of our fellowship is what we have hammered out together in our assemblies” - including commitment to combat racism, a preferential option for the poor, a conviction that war is contrary to the will of God, and a commitment to protect God’s precious creation.

Such commitments and convictions are not a prerequisite for ecumenical participation; rather, they are part of the fabric of public witness now woven through our life together as a result of our common submission to the gospel. They are sinews in this body. My task as General Secretary is to help the churches build up their relationships and to hold them accountable to the commitments they have made to one another through participation in this community of communions.

This is tricky! Councils of churches are both instruments of the churches and of the ecumenical movement. It is not my job to press an advocacy agenda on the members; but is precisely my job to push them when they cling to marks of division or bear only tepid witness to affirmations they have made together with regard to justice and peace. To put it another way, the fellowship experienced in conciliar ecumenism is not only rooted in what the churches are but in what they are called to become. Only with this in mind can we sustain the paradox of both working through the churches and being ahead of the churches.

I hope that this has been an at-least-somewhat-useful way to begin. I suspect that it is almost always easier to do advocacy through a coalition approach, which seeks common cause with like-minded partners, than through a conciliar approach, which seeks consensus within a community of divergent perspectives – especially in an era that exalts diversity. I am convinced, however, that a community of Jew and Greek, Orthodox and Protestant, liberal and conservative, is our most profound witness to the reconciling, liberating love of God. Or, to say it another way, our most effective advocacy stems not just from what we say or do, but from what we are – our unity with one another. And all of this raises very interesting questions for me as I try to assess what constitutes “successful” advocacy – another matter we may want to discuss.

There are at least four other tensions with which I wrestle. I will name the first two quickly since I am sure they are familiar to you.

First is the need for focused advocacy attention on particular priorities and the need for advocacy that integrates multiple themes. At last week’s General Assembly of the NCC, we emphasized the

importance of focused attention on racial justice (lest anyone think that the problem is now behind us thanks to the election of Barack Obama). This would be an important new development. In recent years, racial justice has been part of our broader agenda – as, for example, in the work of our Special Commission on the Just Rebuilding of the Gulf Coast, which brings together concern for poverty, racism, and environmental destruction in the aftermath of hurricane Katrina. Such an integrated approach, I think we said last week, is vital but not sufficient.

Since becoming General Secretary, I have come to appreciate, on the one hand, the need to be very specific in advocacy efforts (e.g., in my proposals to the Israeli ambassador and Ministry of the Interior about changing Israeli law regarding residency permits in Jerusalem and the West Bank); and, on the other hand, the need to name gospel values that potentially refocus public discussion (about which I will say more in a moment). It seems to me, however, that our advocacy work at the NCC often falls somewhere in between: not specific enough to get as much done as we would like, and not radical enough to lift up the counter-cultural voice of scripture.

I have also discovered the importance of responding to the particular priorities of various member communions. My speaking out last month on behalf of Indian Christians who are suffering persecution undoubtedly strengthened the involvement of the Mar Thoma and Malankara Orthodox churches in the NCC. But I have also forcefully insisted that conciliar life means being concerned with the priority issues of others. Their agenda is now yours – difficult as that can sometimes be.

And hidden in all of this is another real dilemma: The NCC, in my judgment, has often dissipated its energy and resources on an almost-endless list of causes. How are we as a community of communions to take seriously what the members – all of them – take seriously and at the same time stay focused on the overriding issues of the day? They don't teach you much of this in General Secretary school!

So that is the first tension: focus and integration. The second has to do with the need to respond with appropriate urgency to crises of the moment and the equally urgent need for long-term formation so that our advocacy grows from our very identity as Christian communities. In the U.S., our churches seem to discover issues with an evangelical zeal, but often retain only short-term interest because they are missing long-term formation.

A person who powerfully makes this case in the U.S. is Audrey Chapman, former executive of the United Church Board for World Ministries, in her book, Faith, Power and Politics. "In the absence of shared understandings about identity and vocation," she writes, "... political ministry tends to be unfocused and diffuse, lacking explicit theological grounding and sustained membership support and involvement. Political witness tends to become a specialized mission activity undertaken primarily by national agencies ... on behalf of the denominations, rather than an expression of the community's faith journey." And this leads to a familiar form of hypocrisy whereby what we preach to the world (what we advocate) is not exemplified in our own structures and lifestyles – thereby undercutting the impact of our advocacy. Things like climate change will not wait for long-term education, but surely such education must accompany our efforts and immediate response.

Perhaps this is a good place to name other factors that have, as I see it, diminished the public witness of many of our churches in this country. I will use my own denomination, the Disciples of Christ, as an example.

- Faced with declining numbers and resources, leaders within the Disciples fear that controversy will further weaken the church. In response, we have, since the mid-1990s, eliminated virtually all national staff positions responsible for social justice ministries and are on the verge of eliminating General Assembly resolutions dealing with contemporary issues.
- Within the Disciples, as in other mainline churches, there is an evident gap between the commitment of at least some leaders and many local church members. As a result, our assemblies will sometimes offer prophetic witness only to discover that the initiatives lack the broad support needed for church-wide action. That is one reason people have argued for the elimination of resolutions: they too often have been “feel good” pronouncements that involve little serious cost or effort.
- Polarization within the church on issues of social concern, and inability to deal constructively with conflict, mean that advocacy is increasingly confined to special interest groups that can be ignored by the rest of the body.
- And, to return to my basic point, the Disciples have shown little capacity for integrating social witness with worship, pastoral care, stewardship, or the other things the church does and is. In the words of Lew Mudge, “...there seems little connection in the minds of church members between the moral convictions to which they bear witness and the nature of the ecclesial community in which these convictions are nurtured” – which means that peace and justice can be relegated to one corner of the church.

The third tension I have in mind, and the one I have paid most attention to since becoming General Secretary, is nicely set forth in a much-neglected book from 2006, Beyond Idealism: A Way Ahead for Ecumenical Social Ethics. In it, the authors – who include such familiar ecumenical scholars as Julio de Santa Ana, Heidi Handzel, and Lew Mudge – argue for a perspective they call “hopeful realism” – realistic assessment of our social situation coupled with a willingness to imagine alternate realities. On the one hand, they argue, ecumenical councils have often responded to war or discrimination or environmental destruction with idealized slogans and utopian pronouncements. On the other hand, the NCC in particular has often been reactive to the world’s agenda, promoting reforms that, while important, leave the underlying status quo basically untouched. Please do not misunderstand: I have no intention to stop pushing for raises in the minimum wage or calling for more recycling or prompting a reduction in U.S. military spending. But these are ways of tweaking the system that stop short of a truly prophetic witness which engenders hope for a different way of living in human society.

Another person who argues this case is the opening plenary speaker at last week’s NCC/CWS General Assembly, Gary Dorrien – who, despite holding the Reinhold Niebuhr chair at Union Theological Seminary, attacks Niebuhr’s “historical realism” in several of his books. Without a social vision of a Good Society that transcends the prevailing order, he contends, Christian ethics will remain captive to that order and social Christianity will restrict itself to marginal reforms. I also like the way Chapman puts it. “Our churches,” she writes, “seem limited to recommending incremental policy changes that differ little from secular political actors.” What is often missing, in her words, “is a compelling religious vision, a sense of the ‘now’ and the ‘not yet’ of God’s [Reign] that challenges and opposes the injustices of the dominant reality by invoking God’s peace and justice.”

You see this tension: hopeful realism. We cannot eradicate evil. The conceit of such utopianism has itself been the fuel of countless tyrannies. But we also must not allow those responsible for present systems of injustice to define what is possible, because we are followers of One whose promise is not just

for another world but for this world made other. This hopeful realism perspective, by the way, is written into the NCC's Strategic Plan for this quadrennium which endorses our current lobbying efforts but also sets forth an overarching goal of "promoting a vision of authentic common life as an alternative to that prevalent in contemporary North American culture." I have been disturbed to hear members of the NCC Governing Board dismiss this as unimportant, tacked on to the real plan.

The final tension I want to mention is the familiar dialectic of God's initiative and our human response. Much discussion about advocacy emphasizes what we accomplish. For example, the Covenant for Action of the Ecumenical Advocacy Alliance speaks of advocacy as church-related witness "in order to bring about a more just, peaceful, and sustainable world." Yes, human effort is essential; but in Christian perspective such effort is understood as response to what God has done, is doing, and will do – as participation in God's mission. Getting this theological point straight, in my experience, has very practical benefits: It is a check against ecclesial self-righteousness. It is a spur to working with others. It is the foundation for deep hopefulness. And it is a reminder to ground all that we do in Bible study and prayer.

As I see it, one of the things that has undermined the National Council's social witness in recent years is inadequate theological and biblical foundation, which is usually a sign that we are pushing an ideological agenda rather than opening ourselves to genuine wrestling with our faith heritage. I still remember an NCC statement opposing some military action of Ronald Regan which included only one biblical verse – "What then are we to say about these things?" - a snippet extracted from Paul's magnificent meditation in Romans 8 on God's love in Jesus Christ and used as mere window dressing for the statement. One of my goals for the coming year is to inaugurate serious theological and social study of several major issues in preparation for the ecumenical movement's centennial celebrations in 2010. I believe such study, while taking energy and resources in the short term, will greatly enhance our advocacy down the road.

There are many other things – tensions – that we probably ought to name, but perhaps these brief reflections will help stimulate conversation this week. I will end by returning to the tension between unity and justice.

Surely, there are times when Christians must take sides against sisters and brothers in the church. But what I have tried to argue in various writings is that, even in such moments, we must recognize that the "them" we oppose are, in some fundamental way, "us." The ecumenical church cannot fear the controversy or confrontation that comes with a bold witness for justice, because that would be paralyzing; but it must hate division, because the story by which we live tells us that we have been linked in communion with persons we otherwise might shun. And nothing else can testify so powerfully that our trust is in God, not in the things or even the communities of our devising.

Public Witness Advocacy

This is a very important week for the WCC; the churches and our advocacy work. The whole of WCC in Geneva could not help but notice that something big was coming up, because several of us have been working toward this week. This week is when we can share our views with each other; hear from panelists who have first hand knowledge of an issue and then go to speak directly to some of the policy decision makers at the UN.

The agenda for this week, as it has been in the past, are Human Rights issues that we will look at through a particular lens of the 60th Anniversary of the Declaration on Human Rights. Chris Ferguson, will say more specifically about the agenda for this week. We can not cover every issue in one week, but we think we have chosen a few of the key issues within the context of the recognition of the Human Rights Declaration's 60th Anniversary. So hold tight, your particular issue might be covered in future years, if it is not in this programme.

In past years, the UNAW event has dealt with Disarmament, the Nuclear Proliferation Treaty, the Horn of Africa, Israel/Palestine, the Sudan Peace process, churches response to conflicts and Responsibility to Protect. It has specifically addressed the situations of Angola, Colombia, Indonesia, Southeast **Europe**, **Colombia** and Iraq. The event has addressed -- UN Reform and Economic Justice; **Eminent persons' response to conflicts in Africa** and the International Criminal Court. Mainly church leaders and staff moderated these sessions. Reports of these sessions are available on internet at the WCC website¹.

As in previous years, we have invited high level UN officers, diplomats, church leaders, scholars on political sciences, theology, ethics to speak with us. We will have time to discuss the issues as groups and perhaps in plenary as well.

The 2007 UNAW was my first time to attend. I have been in my position for just one year as the Director for the WCC Programme where the UNLO is housed. The bigger programme is called-- Public Witness: Addressing Power & Affirming Peace.

Speaking directly to public officials is a bit intimidating to some people while others are more experienced at it. It is not easy work. Trying to convince elected or appointed officials to put into place a justice policy is something we have to keep doing over and over again. Yet, that is what the UNLO and we as members of the churches are challenged to do. If you were here last year, you may have heard me mention that the Prophet Amos and biblical leaders approached leaders about God's justice and so should we.

History and purpose of the UN Advocacy Week

¹ Cfr. e.g. <http://www.wcc-coe.org/wcc/what/international/advocweek04.html>

The UNAW is a direct consequence of the implementation of the recommendations coming from an external "Review of the World Council of Churches relations with the United Nations", done by Kirsten Lund Larsen and delivered in May 2002.

One of the recommendations of the Review under the section entitled "WCC's role towards member churches, ecumenical organizations and ecumenical networks" read: "*WCC should be proactive in testing new forms of co-operation with its ecumenical partners (interested members and their agencies) on UN issues, for example through facilitating joint ad hoc fora for co-ordination, planning and common action on specific issues*". The UNAW is an important forum to achieve this directive from this review process.

The UN Advocacy Week has had different purposes:

Through the Seminars and working sessions, the UNAW has been a forum for:

- Knowing each other, knowing better what we are doing on advocacy;
- Strategizing together (WCC with member churches, specialized ministries, larger coordinations : e.g. FENICC);
- Highlighting WCC's and the ecumenical movement's visibility at the UN (especially through the open Seminars held at the UN premises);
- Interacting with the UN and government representatives;
- Deepening ethical and theological insights on UN related issues including UN Reform;
- And last but not least, a time of encounter and reflection. The ecumenical formation dimension of the UNAW should not be taken lightly. The UNAW has been a week to learn from each other, to experience the ecumenical community and to worship together.

In November 2006, we held a Geneva "Consultation WCC-UNLO New York: Looking Toward the Future" Geneva. The Consultation agreed on the following for the UNAW in the framework of "Deepening Ecumenical Co-operation and Collaboration at the UN in New York":

"It is recommended that the strategy of the WCC UN Advocacy Week be strongly re-affirmed and that it broaden to ensure greater participation of the South and ecumenical partners in common planning with the other churches represented at the UN. It is important for the Week to have a clear focus but be able to cover a wide variety of issues. The week should be a setting for common advocacy at the UN, sharing information, building common strategies, strengthening networks and for conveying of workgroups on priority issues of common concern, it is imperative to ensure proper follow up".

A new ecumenical advocacy paradigm

For this 2008 edition of UNAW, there are at least two challenges that should be taken into account:

Among you are members of the WCC's Advisory body called the Commission of the Churches on International Affairs, which is known affectionately as the CCIA. I serve also as the Director of the CCIA. It meets every 18 months and will meet next in March of 2009, maybe in Cuba—we are researching that possibility, because of an invitation from one of the CCIA members. The Theme will be the Global Financial Crises. Would CCIA members please raise your hands so that other participants know who you are? I mention this because you may hear someone refer to the CCIA. Three of the CCIA sub-groups are here. They are the 'Interreligious Cooperation' sub-group, 'Global Advocacy' sub-group and the one on

'Human Dignity, Security and Rights'. The fourth group on the 'Social Justice and Common Goods' will meet in Norway next week.

The CCIA is comprised of 3 of the 6 Programme areas of the WCC. The three Programmes are Public Witness: Addressing Power and Affirming Peace; Justice Diakonia and Responsibility for Creation; and Inter-Religious Dialogue and Co-operation. The Moderator of the CCIA, Rev. Kjell-Magne Bondevik, is joining us here. There are about 38 members of this CCIA Advisory body to the WCC.

New challenges

Perhaps more than ever, or at least more than in the previous years, the general public seems to be interested in what governments are doing. You may have heard a certain politician talk about 'change'. The coming transition in the US government seems to have given people hope and they may want to engage by becoming involved. This is a time for us to capture that interest and get our views out to the public on these crucial issues. Almost everyone wants to do advocacy and to get their opinion heard. From my previous experience and from what I have been reading, contrary to what you may have heard the republican and democratic candidates say as they were running, lobbyist will continue in Washington and they will get their voices heard. Businesses who think the new President-Elect and new Congress may work against their best interest are looking for increased lobby capacity to assure that their views survive the new administration. Some are called the 'K' street lobbyist, because that is the part of the city where a lot of high powered lobbyists are located. I take the time to refer to this, because it appears that what the US does affects the world's economy, climate and migration patterns. These are the topics of this year's Advocacy Event. Therefore, we all need to partner with our sister churches in the US. They will have their Advocacy week in March. When are your countries Advocacy Week scheduled?

I would like to take a moment to identify the traditional approach to Public Witness Advocacy. It has three primary purposes—

- 1-To advocate the prophetic justice message as understood through the policies of the World Council of Churches (WCC) to the government decision makers and implementers of public policies;
- 2-To support, encourage and enable WCC member churches, National Council of Churches, regional church bodies and their members to speak to their own governments and to the United Nations on behalf of the prophetic justice message;
- 3-To stand in solidarity with those who come before the United Nations as they promote their need for justice and human rights within the context of their own reality, but still in line with approved WCC direction.

These three above, constitute the classic definition of public witness advocacy as used by many of the advocacy offices in the United States and other places.

We fulfill purpose number 1, when we go to visit directly with officials as an organization of the WCC . This is the staff and leadership mandate.

Public witness statements and comments quote WCC Central Committee policies directly to the actions of governments and their officials. WCC statements and governmental visits would support and

promote the Human Rights Instruments² of the United Nations and those of regional governments. Where actions of governments are in opposition to UN Human Rights instruments, the WCC would be obliged to point that out. The work of the UNLO and the Geneva UN advocacy is in fulfillment of purpose 1 above, as meetings happen with government officials. (As with the prophet, we are to 'establish justice at the gate' Amos 5:15)

We fulfill purpose #2, by alerting you when the time may be good to send messages to your own government on a given issue.

Messages contain decisive and directive actions for readers to take regarding the issue at hand and how they can impact it from their location. We are discussing the development of a monthly Action Brief that would be succinct, purposeful and timely.

We fulfill purpose #3, when we do our best to assist churches or groups who come to either UN Geneva or UN New York to advance their concerns.-

Advanced written talking points, are needed for those who go into the government offices to advance their point of view for justice and human rights. These talking points could also serve as model for others to use as they write their own letters or make their own contacts with government officials.

Ancient Challenge-

As the WCC continues to be faced with the challenge of speaking truth to power on issues of justice, it will be called to stand with the rights and well being of the people and the best interest of those who may be suffering from an injustice at the hands of the government. The WCC has historically spoken in support of the UN Declaration on Human Rights and other instruments on behalf of the rights of the people. Our bible tells us to "*Hate evil love good, establish justice at the gate*" (Amos 5: 15).

When to speak and what to say can be a challenge in some of today's conflict situations, the WCC finds that it is hearing the words of the Chief Priest of the Temple, Amaziah who says to not speak because "the Land is not able to bear all his words" (Amos 7: 11). This ancient challenge is still with us. Do we speak on behalf of the **people** when we go to the governments, through our Human Rights and Human Dignity work? Or do we speak on behalf of the **churches** and only to the churches on behalf of our call to be in dialogue? When are we standing with the Prophet Amos and when are we standing with Priest Amaziah? We need to ask this question each time we approach a crisis. When do we move away from the civil authority? "*Let every person be subject to the governing authorities; for there is no authority except from God, and those authorities that exist have been instituted by God*" (Rom. 13:1).

In this line, the focus of our advocacy work has been to bring change in a variety of dimensions: in policy making, in civil society participation and empowerment, in deepening democracy and accountability of institutions, in expanding citizens' awareness of their responsibilities and rights.

The WCC's unique contribution on ecumenical advocacy lies in its constituency. When WCC speaks it is its member churches and ecumenical partners who are speaking on behalf of those who are

² Particularly, WCC work is geared toward support of the Universal Declaration on Human Rights, UN Rights of Indigenous Peoples, Millennium Development Goals, Economic and Social Development, work of WHO.

suffering directly and those who can not speak by themselves. Our WCC advocacy work from Geneva and New York should be seen as a service to the churches. The WCC can connect the work of the national and regional churches to one another and in support of one another.

Advocacy as public campaign or public statement is meaningless if it does not build on such ongoing engagement with people and their concern for life in all its dimensions. Theologically, an understanding of advocacy points to the three basic components of accompaniment, solidarity and public witness that belong together (life in community-*koinonia*, service-*diakonia* and witness-*martyria*, cannot be separated). These three are what distinguishes us from NGO's and their understanding and praxis of advocacy. It means that we need to do advocacy with member churches and people concerned and it may include a variety of methods.

Ultimately, our advocacy goal is to have justice as part of the hearts and minds of us all, but particularly the public policy decision makers. It would be nice if justice could be internalized by us all. Jeremiah 31: 31 states, "*Write on the hearts and not on tablets of stone*". Paper is our modern day stone where we write our declarations and laws. Today we might say write justice on our hearts and not only on tablets of paper.

Finally I strongly believe the ethical and theological dimension of the UNAW should continue to be further strengthened and developed. I would like to see papers developed that would point to our biblical and theological rationale for public witness advocacy. This is the contribution we make to the justice agenda that NGOs do not. The religious moral view is our unique contribution as people of faith through the ecumenical movement. Perhaps what is needed now is the development of a kind of WCC Advocacy Tool Kit that would contain ideas on how advocacy can be done as well as Biblical commentary on why it must be done. Next year, we will go beyond our traditional partners for this event and be part of a theological consultation with some of the local seminaries here in New York. We will work with Programme 1 of the WCC on this approach next year. Programme 1 of the WCC is called, "the Ecumenical Movement in the 21st Century".

But I am getting ahead of my self here. We need to focus on this year. And this year's issues.

To conclude, I would like to recognize the UNAW committee and staff who have put this event together. They have worked long and hard.

Dr. David Little

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The Enduring Importance of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, with Special Attention to Freedom of Religion or Belief

I. Introduction

A. Those of us who seek today to celebrate the “enduring importance of the UDHR” face at least two serious challenges: 1) considerable skepticism, among philosophers, theologians, religious groups and others, concerning the justifiability of the whole idea of HRs, and 2) challenges to existing “religious rights” designed to safe-guard freedom of fundamental belief and exercise that are contained in the UDHR, and in subsequent HR documents, such as the ICCPR. These challenges include recommendations for large-scale amendments to present wording.

--Both of these challenges need to be confronted and dealt with, if those of us who consider ourselves HRs advocates in general, and advocates of “freedom of religion or belief,” in particular, are to carry on.

--I am assuming that because this UN Advocacy Week we are participating in is being sponsored by the WCC, there is a special interest among people in this room in the question of religious rights, though I also assume that you will not be indifferent to the larger question of the justification of HRs.

B. Two Sets of Challenge

1. Skepticism toward the Justification of HRs.

- a. AMac: “The truth is plain: there are no such rights [as HRs], and the belief in them is one with belief in witches and unicorns...HRs then are fictions.”
- b. The late R Rorty: (partly paraphrasing) The urge to find some universal common truth in morality or anything else is an “urge that should be repressed...This means that when the secret police come, when the torturers violate the innocent, [we cannot say] to them, ‘There is something within you which you are betraying.’ That is so because there is nothing deep down inside us except what we human beings have put there ourselves, what we have invented.
- c. Stanley Hauerwas: “America is the only country that has the misfortune of being founded on a philosophical mistake—namely, the notion of inalienable rights. Christians do not believe that we have inalienable rights.”

- d. Wide range of non-Western critics of HRs: Ideas contained in the UDHR, etc. are culturally relative, and reflect peculiar Western, but no means universal, moral standards. They are part of a highly parochial History or narrative.

2. Challenges to “Religious Rights.”

- a. Two (overlapping) versions I want to mention:
 - i. The impulse to alter substantially Article 18 of the UDHR (ICCPR), which provides (in part) that “Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion, [including] the freedom to change [one’s] religion or belief...[where “belief” means non-religious or anti-religious conviction].”

--I have encountered some Hindu, Buddhist, and Muslim representatives who in different ways have all argued strenuously against “the freedom to change” one’s religion or belief on grounds that such a provision militates against what they regard as their basic beliefs. To be allowed, they say, to change one’s belief, to defect from the religious community into which one was born, amounts to a betrayal of one’s definitive heritage. How can that be right’?

- ii. Opponents of Religious Defamation, intending to narrow the permissible range of Religious Speech.

--Especially provoked by the publication of the anti-Muslim cartoons in Denmark in 2006, the OIC proposed that the HRC pass a Resolution “Combating the Defamation of Religion” (March 30, 2007). Para. 7 “Urges states to take resolute action to prohibit the dissemination, including through political institutions and organizations, of racist and xenophobic ideas and materials aimed at any religion or its followers that constitute incitement to racial and religious hatred, hostility or violence.”

Proponents of the resolution invoked Article 20. para. 2 of the ICCPR: Any advocacy of national, racial or religious hatred that constitutes incitement to discrimination, hostility or violence shall be prohibited by law.”

--Has generated an extensive and on-going debate within the international community over the proper limits of religious speech.

- C. In the rest of my remarks, I want to try to defend the HR system against both the general challenges and the more specific ones that concern the protection of religious or belief. (As I hope will become clear, the defense I offer applies in a similar way to both sets of challenges.)

--Toward the end of my comments on freedom of religion or belief, I want to draw out some connections to the case of Sri Lanka, which is, I understand, to be one of the subjects of attention during this week. While I worked at the USIP in the nineties, I conducted a study of intolerance in Sri Lanka, as part of a series of studies we engaged in on “Religion, Nationalism, and Intolerance.” I shall, very briefly, share with you a few of my conclusions, which I believe are still relevant.

II. Defense

A. General Challenges

1. To begin with, let's be absolutely clear about the meaning of the language of the UDHR and the many HR docs it inspired.

--Despite the claims of some scholars, HR language is indisputably moral and universal in character.

--I mean by "moral," language that is taken to address matters of fundamental human welfare in an authoritative way, and I mean by "universal," language taken to be applicable to all human beings everywhere in the sense that everyone may both appeal to it, and be held accountable to it.

--How else are we to understand certain central phrases and statements from the UDHR?:

Preamble: "Whereas recognition of the inherent dignity and of the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family is the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world,"

"Whereas disregard and contempt for HRs have resulted in barbarous acts which have outraged the conscience of mankind..."

And Article 2: "Everyone is entitled to all the rights and freedoms set forth in this Declaration, without distinction of any kind, such as race, color, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin,..."

2. According to Johannes Morsink, author of the definitive study of the mid-20th-century provenance of HR language, together with the legislative history behind it, the idea of HRs was first and foremost grounded in a feeling on the part of all "ed moral revulsion" against the "absolutely crucial factor of the Holocaust," encompassing as it did the array of atrocities perceived to have been perpetrated so widely in the 20s, 30s, and 40s. Without that shared moral revulsion, "the Dec," says Morsink, would never have been written." "The drafters" "generalized their own feelings over the rest of humanity." "They believed that any morally healthy human being would have been similarly outraged when placed in similar circumstances," since expressing moral outrage in response to Hitler's actions is taken to be a critical, if minimal, defining characteristic of what it means to be a "morally healthy human being." That is, presumably, what the drafters meant by their phrase, "barbarous acts which have outraged the conscience of [humankind]" [as we would say today].

-Don't forget the GLOBAL context of the FASCIST barbarity—Japan, as well.

3. Is there a general account that can provide a justification for this feeling of “shared moral revulsion,” of “moral outrage” that the drafters obviously held in common?
4. I believe there is. Goes like this: The use of force, defined as the infliction of death, impairment, severe pain or injury or coerced confinement, naturally begs strong moral justification, wherever it occurs. That is because of the obvious adverse consequences that inevitably result from using force, and because of the persistent temptation in human affairs to use force arbitrarily. No human being anywhere could reasonably doubt that Hitler’s grounds for the kind and amount of force used at his command—appeals to a preposterous theory of racial superiority and completely unfounded allegations of dire external threat from weak neighbors like Poland and Belgium--were manifestly and grossly fallacious. Therefore, everyone must conclude that Hitler’s actions constituted “barbarous acts outrageous to the human conscience”--that is: utterly unjustified and condemnable applications of force. (Same would be roughly true of the actions of Japanese fascism).
5. All this, as the drafters understood, ought to be perfectly plain to everyone; those who fail to recognize it are themselves under moral suspicion.
6. The fact that the use of force, wherever it appears, inescapably carries with a “warning label” means that people who are its victims, and usually its instruments, demand to be given “good reasons” for it of a very exacting kind.

I believe this has something to do with the way the human mind works. We human beings seem to be so constituted that certain kinds of reasons—for example, self-serving reasons, like “I’m hitting you in the face because I like to,” or manifestly invalid reasons, like “we invaded country x, asserting it to be an unquestionable threat to our national security, even though we knew full well it wasn’t”—could not imaginably serve as a morally acceptable basis for using force “in anybody’s language.” And not only would we have to think of such reasons as “irrational”; we would also have regard them as “morally condemnable.”

7. To make all this transparently clear is the heart of the fascist example; that is what the drafters grasped once and for all in a moment of deepest human insight. If there was ever any doubt about it before, the Hitler experience decisively disproved the maxim, “might makes right.” All you have to do is look what happened when that maxim was put into practice in the middle of the 20th century.

--In short, the fascist example showed once and for all the fearsome outcome of
ARBITRARY POWER gone wild.

8. Four key implications:
 - 1) There exists, afterall, a minimal form of universally binding morality, something that makes sense of phrases like, “barbarous acts” and “the conscience of mankind,” or of “humanity,” as we would say today.

- 2) Setting up a system of Universal HRs is the necessary consequence of the moral outrage fascist actions necessarily provoked. That is because the symptoms of Arbitrary Power—torture and the infliction of cruel and unusual punishment, enslavement, extrajudicial killing, etc. are made possible by the disappearance or disregard of the institutions of individual protection guaranteed the rule of law, separations of governmental powers, and a vibrant nongovernmental sphere. A system of enforceable individual protections against arbitrary assaults on body and person, or against depriving people of the opportunity legally and politically to help restrain power, is the only sufficient guarantee against collective domination of the kind inspired by fascism.
- 3) These HR standards become the moral baseline for judging all cultures, religions, ways of life, and is in that sense “prior to them all.” All responsible political, military or religious leaders, whether in Rwanda in 1994, Srebrenica in 1995, the Kurdish area of Iraq in 1987-88, Burma in 2008, Darfur, Sudan right up to the present, or Abu Ghraib from 2004-6, all necessarily stand accountable, all necessarily bear the burden of proof for their actions, no matter what their “language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, etc.”
- 4) The “fascist model” provides a compelling reference point for interpreting and applying HRs standards. There will of course be disputes over “how close” a given society’s or state’s behavior is to the fascist model, or whether various local excuses mitigate responsibility in some way, but it seems obvious from the examples I just mentioned that there exists no lack of “clear cases,” or “very-near-clear-cases” all around us to substantiate the approach I am defending.

B. Challenges to “Religious Rights.”

--I mentioned two challenges: Proposals to revise Art. 18 by eliminating the provision permitting people to change their religion or belief; and Proposals to narrow the range of permissible religious speech by punishing language that “defames religion” in any way.

1. I offer essentially the same defense against both challenges, though I need to adjust it somewhat depending on the special features of each one.
2. That defense amounts simply to invoking the “fascist model” I just commented on in regard to protecting religious freedom.
 - a. At the heart of fascist ideology was the impulse to prevent by all means necessary any dissent or independence in matters of religious conviction and identity. Together with their notorious policies of liquidating millions of Jews and “undesirable” religious minorities, like the Jehovah’s Witnesses, the Nazis harassed Catholics, curtailing and suppressing most of their practices, and eventually came to dominate the Protestant Church by means of “terroristic methods.” In particular, fascism, especially in its German and Japanese versions, constituted a direct, comprehensive, and systematic assault on the rights to

religious liberty that were subsequently guaranteed in the documents, and that were explicitly formulated against the background of fascist offenses.
--These included Art. 18 of the UDHR (religious freedom) and Art. 20 of the ICCPR (protection against religious hatred inciting to discrimination, hostility, or violence).

b. A fundamental objective of these and other "religious or belief rights" is to restrain the exercise of arbitrary power or "collective domination," as I referred to it above. While the capacity to punish and thereby control the expression of basic beliefs is obviously not the only instance of arbitrary power exemplified by the fascist model, it is essential to it. In the light of that background, the right to religious freedom is regarded in the US Bill of Rights as "the first freedom." Protecting freedom of conscience is assumed to be a necessary condition against what the Dec of Indep describes as "absolute Tyranny." The same is true with the HR instruments, including the right to choose and to change one's mind regarding matters of conscience, free of coercive interference by the state or other outsiders.
--True that authoritative HRs jurisprudence permits a state or official religion, but (please note!) only so long as it "shall not result in any impairment of the enjoyment of any of the rights under [the ICCPR], including article 18..., nor any discrimination against adherents of other religions or non-believers."

c. A key point follows from what I argued earlier: that the "minimal form of universally binding morality" is understood as independent of and prior to any particular religious or philosophical point of view.

--Clear meaning of Art 2 of the UDHR: "Everyone is entitled to all rights and freedoms "without distinction of any kind, such as "sex, language, religion,...national or social origin,...birth or other status."

--Nurser: It is important to recall, especially in this gathering, a point made by John Nurser, in *For All Peoples and Nations: The Ecumenical Church and HRs*, that many of the people who at first supported a HR to religious liberty believed it required an explicit religious foundations. However, O. Frederick Nolde, an early proponent of the WCC and the Churches Commission on Int'l Affairs, and one of the heroes of Nurser's book, came to take a different view: "Freedom demands a broader base than can be offered by religion alone." Rights to religious freedom (which he played an important role in drafting) should be placed, he said, "in a secular context."

d. Religions and philosophies are of course clearly at liberty to formulate and perspectives on HRs, including criticizing them, so long, however, as they do not violate them in practice, or else that they undertake by due process to alter them. (Altering existing "religious rights" is of course exactly what the groups issuing the challenges I am dealing with are trying to do.)

e. My response to the First Challenge, namely, the proposal to revise the right to choose and change one's mind regarding basic belief would remove one of the key protections against Arbitrary Power, and therefore should be resisted.

3. Second Challenge (Defamation of Religion)

a. My response to the Second Challenge is, as I said, a version of the same point. My worry about the proposal to restrict the range of permissible religious speech beyond the limits that now exist runs the serious risk, again, of removing

one of the key protections against Arbitrary Power. That is, it opens the door to state or other forms of interference in questions of conscience which represents a step back from existing standards.

b. I agree with Asma Jahangir, UNSPRFRB:

1. According to her, the proper limits on religious speech are defined by Art. 20 of the ICCPR: What is impermissible and subject to punishment are all statements that “constitute incitement to acts of violence or discrimination against individuals on the basis of their religion [or belief].” (Cites the German Fascist background as a reference for her understanding.)
--Her interpretation of Art 20. She leaves out reference to “hostility,” which in my view is advisable. D and V are legally definable, hostility is not. (Too elastic). The right to freedom of religion or belief, as enshrined in the relevant international legal standards, does not include the right to have a religion or belief that is free from criticism or ridicule...Defamation of religions may offend people and hurt their feelings but it does not necessarily or at least directly result in a violation of their rights, including the right to freedom of religion. Freedom of religion primarily confers a right to act in accordance with one’s religion but does not bestow a right for believers to have their religion itself protected from all adverse comment.
2. Adds idea about extra-legal and educational work as way of dealing with “hostility.”

Conclusion



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National Congress of Peru

***Los derechos humanos desde la
visión de los pueblos indígenas / Human Rights from the
Perspective of Indigenous Peoples***

Please find Ms. Sumire's PowerPoint presentation in the UNAW Resources at:
<http://www.oikoumene.org/en/events-sections/unaw/resources.html>.

Rev. Jorge Domingues

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Climate Change in the UN Agenda

I would like to start by raising a question to ourselves: what is the Carbon footprint of the ecumenical movement and the meetings that the churches organize to do our work, our mission?

I was invited to participate at this panel by the CWS, after the consultation we had to discuss the mission of that organization in times of vulnerability. I am a staff with a “specialized ministry” agency of the United Methodist Church – the General Board of Global Ministries – and as such, I look into the UN and its agenda as a platform for how we as Christian churches can engage governments and nations on issues that impact the world and the human race.

Throughout its history, the UN has been a forum for decisions (not always implemented as expected) for issues that have affected the nations in the past. Peace, development, relief, human rights and other areas of action of the UN are referred to “what has happened or is happening, so it doesn’t happen again.”

Climate change, though, is one of the few themes at the UN that relates to what has not happened yet, but is starting to happen. It is a preventive action to try to mitigate the effects of our behavior as human society for the past decades and centuries. It is a wake up call to all of us to remember that we are connected with this household, the planet Earth, in intrinsic ways.

We can’t just subdue (Gn. 1.28) and subject the creation to our futility (Rm. 8.20). We are called to reveal ourselves as “children of God” and set the creation “free from its bondage to decay” (Rm.8.21).

Nevertheless, as reminded by Martin Luther King Jr., more than four decades ago, “there is such a thing as being too late... We may cry out desperately for time to pause in her passage, but time is deaf to every plea and rushes on.” (“Where do we go from here: chaos or community”, HDR 2007/2008, p. 7)

Climate change was not an issue a few decades ago. It took a lot of scientific research to get it into our mindset and in the UN agenda. There is a lot of uncertainty of the impact of greenhouse gas (GHG) emission, but enough evidence and knowledge to recognize that our planet is at risk. Our life and of 2 future generations is at danger, but this risk, this vulnerability doesn’t affect all of us equally.

The different standards of living, distribution of resources and access to health and education cause the impact of climate change to unequally affect rich and poor nations, and rich and poor populations within a single nation. “For some of the world’s poorest people, the consequences could be apocalyptic.” (HDR 2007/2008, p. 3)

The commitment and actions of the international community to fight and reduce poverty is at danger of being reduced, if not reversed, due to climate change. The disputes for reduced water resources, the migration due to droughts and extreme weather events, and the sea level rise have the potential to disrupt and hinder the human development of a large portion of humanity.

The UN has been challenged, mostly by developing nations, to respond to the impact of climate change in coordinated way. The UN Environmental Program (UNEP) and the UN Development Program (UNDP) have started a partnership since the last climate convention in 2006. It has focused on reducing vulnerability and building capacity of developing countries, and at the same time addressing the causes of the climate change by negotiating the reduction of GHG emissions.

The next step for the UN is to move on to policies that will provide significant and durable results. These policies will not only demand political commitment of all nations, but also significant economic commitment. There will be significant costs which cannot be absorbed evenly throughout the world. Again we are faced with inequality.

Under the current economic and financial crisis, the challenge is even greater. There is a risk that short and mid term economic solutions can have a negative impact on the implementation of the needed policies to reverse the mitigation of the GHG emissions. Rich nations may find themselves less inclined or able to take their share of the costs the controlling climate change.

The connection of the environmental challenge with the development challenge faced by the human society is a door for an acceptable way forward. The 2007/2008 Human Development Report's recommendation are a good example of the UN system moving the climate change agenda to agreeable and realistic goals (HDR 2007/2008, p. 29 – 30):

- Develop a multilateral framework for avoiding dangerous climate change under the post-2012 Kyoto Protocol;
- Put in place policies for sustainable carbon budgeting – the agenda for mitigation;
- Strengthen the framework for international cooperation;
- Put climate change adaptation at the centre of the post-2012 Kyoto framework and international partnerships for poverty reduction.

The next step for the UN is to link climate change with human rights. This is not going to be an easy connection as some of the same nations which are affected by poverty and climate change is not willing to bring the human rights issues to the discussion. If the cost of the development/climate change connection faces resistance of the richer nations, the link with human rights will face resistance from a varied spectrum of nations.

The churches play an important role in the process of advocating governments and international organizations to implement the necessary policies to ensure a reverse of course. But they play even a more important role in bringing the human rights agenda to the discussions on climate change.

I would also like to point that the participation of the private and the nonprofit sectors are essential in achieving the goals we want. The need for ongoing shareholders advocacy with companies to become responsible for environmentally sound practices, as well as ongoing education of our constituency and beyond are essential actions that the churches and the ecumenical community has to take as inherent to our mission.

Finally, going back to the question that I asked at the beginning of my presentation – our Carbon footprint. It is time that we also take action on changing our culture, at all levels: personal, community, national, and church wide. We have been on the forefront of the fight for justice, against poverty, peace and even the integrity of creation. But we need to be models of changed behaviors from the small things we can do at a personal level, as well as churches who can lead on issues of climate change as well.

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The Churches' Concern on Climate Change

Interest of the WCC and its Member Churches in Climate Change

Climate change has been a matter of profound interest and preoccupation for the WCC and its member churches as it is seen as a threat to God's creation, occasioned by the emission of anthropogenic polluting gases that are introduced into the atmosphere. The pollution of the atmosphere and consequently its warming at a global scale, and finally the climate change associated to it, are one of the greatest risks challenging the existence and continuity of life on earth.

It is for the universal scope -or "catholicity"- of the climate change issue that the WCC and its Member Churches are concerned and involved in its study and in common advocacy and action addressing its causes and consequences.

For the churches, the threat of climate change is a deeply spiritual issue, rooted in the Holy Scriptures. We believe that the solutions to the problem will not only be of a political, technological and economic nature. We believe that ethics and religion will necessarily become essential components on which the solutions will be based.

This has been the main reason for our presence in different international meetings and in the yearly Sessions of the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, but also for working with church related development agencies on adaptation measures by vulnerable communities.

The voice of the WCC as well as the voice of Church world leaders has been heard within the ecumenical movement. There are also many signs that they are indeed very welcomed, and seriously taken into account by the civil society.

Churches and the Ecumenical Movement acting together

To this respect, very important has been the work and contributions of the Churches that during the last two decades have enriched the universe of work on this issue, by studying and analyzing, and by their dedication to this vital concern.

The Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople, the Church of England (Anglican Communion), the United Church of Canada (UCC), the Presbyterian Church USA (PCUSA), the Church of Sweden, the Church of Denmark, the Church of Norway, the Protestant and Reformed Churches of Germany united under the EKD, the Protestant Churches of Switzerland, the United Methodist Church, and the Roman Catholic Church and the Patriarchate of Moscow, among many other Churches have been preoccupied and have occupied themselves studying this problem inside and outside the WCC.

There are many other ecumenical examples of the collaboration of Churches at national, regional and international levels. In brief I could mention some examples that will illustrate this collaboration.

The Latin American Council of Churches – CLAI, working with UNEP and with several groups of the civil society of our region on the “Environmental Citizenship Project”, on climate change, water, desertification, etc.

The All Africa Conference of Churches - AACC – a partner of the WCC in workshops and consultations focused on the development of local communities through the implementation of theoretical and practical assistance, and on links between climate change and water issues.

The Pacific Conference of Churches – PCC - and the WCC Pacific Office are active in helping churches throughout the Island States in the Pacific, to address the serious threats that climate change poses to their societies. In 2004 two consultations on climate change were co-sponsored by the WCC and the PCC in Tarawa, capital of the Republic of Kiribati. The first one oriented to young participants, while the second one with the Kiribati Protestant Church (KPC) and representatives of other PCC the Member Churches, produced the “Otin Taai Declaration”. “Otin Taai” in the language of Kiribati, means sunrise, a sign of hope, light emerging from darkness, bringing hope to populations menaced by the sea level rise due to climate change and its terrible pending menace: the forced migration due to climatic (or environmental) causes.

The Christian Conference of Asia – CCA, an important regional ecumenical organisation has old links with the WCC. Its climate change programme has developed its own series of consultations and workshops as well as practical assistance in cases of emergency situations in the region due to climate change.

In India, the WCC has supported LAYA, a Development NGO and its associated Network called the Indian Network on Ethics and Climate Change (INECC). Christian organisations are members of INECC as well as Faith Communities based in different regions of India, offering practical and educational assistance to Adivasi rural communities, and conducting programmes on climate change, development, water, agriculture, etc.

The European Christian Environmental Network (ECEN) is the chief instrument of the Conference of European Churches (CEC) to address our relationship to nature and the environment from the perspective of Christian theology and Christian way of life. Its Working Group on Climate Change has developed a comprehensive and active programme, conducting seminars, consultations, etc.

The WCC Working Group on Climate Change

The WCC’ s involvement in issues related to climate phenomena began in 1988 when its former Sub-Unit on Church and Society co-sponsored a consultation with the participation of Churches, environmental groups, scientists and politicians in Switzerland.

Later on, the WCC Climate Change Programme was carried forward by the WCC Working Group on Climate Change. This ad hoc group was founded in 1992 during the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) that met in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, in June of that year.

Since then, the WCC Working Group on Climate Change meets once a year either in specifically programmed meetings or at the occasion of the yearly sessions of the Conference of the Parties (COP) to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC).

Its members represent an ample diversity of Churches, environmental groups and Specialised Ministries (development agencies). They come from practically all the regions of the world: Africa, Asia, Eastern Europe, Western Europe, Latin America and the Caribbean, North America, and the Pacific, forming an ecumenical network that organises workshops, participates in consultations, and attends international meetings, bringing the voice of the churches and the ethical, moral and spiritual approach to the negotiations.

The WCC and the International Negotiations

The main interest of the WCC during international negotiations, in particular during the sessions of the Conference of the Parties to the UNFCCC and so far to the Conference serving as the Meeting of the Parties to the Kyoto Protocol, is to be the voice calling the negotiators attention on issues as ethic, equity and justice. Without these fundamental concepts no durable and sustainable agreements will be achieved.

The unsustainable consumption patterns of minorities are a cause for increased poverty of majorities. The gap between the rich and the poor becomes wider every day, giving more and more to whom already have in excess, and giving less and less to people who can barely survive. For some to maintain and for others to reach those levels of consumption, the earth's natural resources are being depleted at a much higher speed.

We are convinced that other paths exist and must be followed and strongly believe that an ascetic dimension must be taken into consideration. Reduce and restrain consumerism and energy demand, adopting a sincere self-control to allow an equitable development for all, while maintaining the ecological integrity of the biosphere.

Viable and sustainable alternatives to the prevailing economic model ought to be found. Time has come for humanity to put aside self-centred interests, reflect carefully and act with responsibility on issues that affect humankind as a whole.

Conclusion

Climate change challenges churches and the global ecumenical movement to become even more explicit about our own vision of the 'oikoumene', the entire inhabited earth, as God's common household.

As Churches, we insist that individuals, but also countries in their international relations, should never leave aside the golden rule: treat your neighbour as you want your neighbour to treat you. In this golden rule there is implicit the culture of justice and equity, the culture of ethics and solidarity, the culture of love and respect for one another, conforming altogether the culture of Peace.

A change of paradigm is needed now. In order to do so it is imperative a profound and sincere metanoia –a repentance- followed by a metamorphosis

We still are at a point where the human race is able to make a decision that could, even now, save God's creation from the otherwise inevitable desecration caused by human induced climate change.

As quoting our WCC Statement to the joint Plenary of the High Level Segment of COP13 and CMP3 in Bali, Indonesia, in December 2007, I exclaim once more:

“THIS FAR AND NO FURTHER: ACT FAST AND ACT NOW!”

JAT-ECA: Buenos Aires-10-NOV-2008



Mr. Fe'iloaitau Kaho Tevi
General Secretary
Pacific Council of Churches

Changing Paradigms: A Challenge for Ecumenical Solidarity

Please find Mr. Tevi's PowerPoint presentation in the UNAW Resources at:
<http://www.oikoumene.org/en/events-sections/unaw/resources.html>.