

Address by Dr Agnes Abuom, Moderator of the WCC Central Committee

Your Holiness,

Karibu – welcome! Your presence is a sign of hope and encouragement to the WCC member churches and to many people of good will worldwide. Your visit here at the Ecumenical Centre shows that the churches' commitment to unity for the sake of all humanity and all of God's creation is alive and strong.

Our shared hope in the Gospel of Jesus Christ and the common witness of the churches are antidotes to despair and indifference at a time of fragmentation and powerful self-interests that tend to triumph over solidarity, justice and peace.

It is more than just a coincidence that today's Gospel reading is taken from Matthew 6:7-15, the passage about prayer that includes the text of the Lord's Prayer.

There can hardly be a more basic text for our pilgrimage of justice and peace than this. Praising God's holy name, praying for God's kingdom to come that includes God's care for the daily bread, the forgiveness of debts and the rescue from evil, we are reminded of the daily practice of mercy and care that Jesus wanted to be the hallmarks of Christian life.

The Lord's Prayer informs in which direction and how we are walking, praying and working together in mutual love. It shows us what really counts today and opens a way into the future. And it reminds us that we neglect our responsibilities for life, justice and peace if the churches are divided. We know that the gift of God's grace and reconciliation cannot be reserved to my community, my faith tradition or nation. It flows out of God's love for this world.

As an African saying goes; "If you want to go fast, go alone; if you want to go far, go together."

You came from Rome to Geneva. We hope that we can move on with you as fellow pilgrims on our way:

- visiting the wounds of those suffering,
- celebrating God's gift of life and
- engaging together in transformative actions that lift up the lives of people wherever there is need for justice and peace. Our prayer is that we can journey together to build bridges and create spaces for the divided and isolated people to reconnect and experience mutually enriching relationships. The world is waiting for us Christians to be together actors for justice and peace, putting those at the periphery at the centre.

This requires that member churches of the WCC and the Roman Catholic Church are working well together internationally and locally. We are grateful to you, Your Holiness, that we can already see a new quality of cooperation between the WCC and the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue, the new Dicastery

for Promoting Integral Human Development and even the Secretariat of State. We are organizing together a World Conference on Xenophobia, Racism, and Populist Nationalism in the context of Global Migration in September this year in Rome. I am personally looking forward to fostering also our cooperation with children and young adults. They are the majority in many countries, but suffer most from poverty, preventable diseases and violence. We are working on strengthening the churches' commitment to children in the areas of child protection, participation, climate justice initiatives with children, and increasingly on children as migrants and refugees. I am glad to see that this year's General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops in Rome is concentrating on young people in the world of today, their faith and vocational discernment.

As moderator of the WCC Central Committee, I had the privilege of participating, together with ecumenical partners, in various processes, in meetings, in solidarity visits.

We see fruits of such cooperation in many concrete situations. Let me just highlight how important it is that Christian churches look at each other as one in South Sudan, how critical joint action for justice and peace is for the peace process in Colombia, how powerful is to pray and work together for the reunification process in the Korean Peninsula, how much a concerted action is needed in Burundi and the Democratic Republic of Congo.

I am aware of both the imperative and the great potential of an ecumenical synergy in South Sudan. "Walking, praying and working together", churches strengthened their role in society and became a trusted companion in a pilgrimage of justice and peace in difficult times. We give thanks to God for the active participation of the Roman Catholic Church in this process.

I have been to Colombia and realized with gratitude that the efforts of the World Council of Churches, together with the Geneva-based development alliance for Action of Churches Together – the ACT Alliance, the Lutheran World Federation and the Latin American Council of Churches (CLAI) to encourage peace negotiations had been well received and brought results. The way ahead might be long. But, once again, walking and praying together, we can play a constructive role.

I have been to South Korea for the WCC assembly and on other occasions. The concern of reunification has always been a high priority for the ecumenical family. Recently an ecumenical delegation including the general secretaries of the WCC and World Communion of Reformed Churches visited North Korea. We give thanks to God that today we are able to celebrate together with Korean Christian Federation and the National Council of Churches in Korea the commitments, expressed by political authorities, encompassing long-held ecumenical hopes and aspirations for peace on the Korean Peninsula.

I have been part of a solidarity visit to Burundi and since I have been working closely with many ecumenical partners and friends, including the Roman Catholic Church. We are committed to working with all religious leaders and all peace-seeking people of Burundi and to supporting their tireless efforts on the ground to secure a lasting peace and stability in Burundi and the region-at-large.

What we say about South Sudan, Colombia, Korea and Burundi applies in many ways to countries and churches of the Middle East and others from Africa, Asia and the Americas that

come to mind. We have heard our sisters and brothers calling for our prayers and solidarity during our Central Committee meeting. We hope and pray for them, that your visit marks indeed a new phase of Christian cooperation and unity.

We want to assure you that we pray also for you and ask for God's rich blessings for your witness and service to the church and this world that we all share.

May God's will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Amen