

Speech on the Occasion of the Visit to the World Council of Churches of His Holiness Pope Francis

Rev Dr Olav Fykse Tveit, General Secretary WCC

Geneva, 21 June 2018

Your Holiness, Pope Francis,

Your Eminences, Your Excellencies, honoured guests,

Dear sister and brothers in Christ,

“This is the day that the Lord has made, let us be glad and rejoice in it!” (Psalm 118:24)

During these days we celebrate the one ecumenical movement. As we observe the 70th anniversary of the World Council of Churches, we share the one call to unity, to work for justice and peace for all. Today we are honoured that Your Holiness, Pope Francis, has decided to visit the World Council of Churches on this occasion. Today we are passing a milestone on our journey. It is a day that many around the world have prayed for and longed for.

We are walking, praying and working together. We have been walking, praying and working together. And we will be walking, praying and working together.

With whom? First of all, together with Jesus Christ. Our churches have been woven together by Jesus Christ. This tapestry reminds us of this firm fact. We are created by God as human beings for fellowship and unity with one another. We are brought into the one fellowship of the one church of Jesus Christ through baptism. Our calling is woven into our lives as it is in this tapestry: “That they may all be one ... so the world may believe” (John 17:21).

Today, with this visit, we show that it is possible to overcome divisions and distance, as well as deep conflicts caused by different traditions and convictions of faith. There are several ways from conflict to communion. And of course, we have not yet overcome all differences and divisions. Therefore we pray together that the Holy Spirit will guide us and unite us as we move on. I was deeply moved the first time I saw this tapestry and sensed its call of Christ to me. I am deeply moved by being here today together.

In the tapestry we see the biblical symbol of rivers that are watering the trees, whose leaves give healing to the nations. The world in which we live is in desperate need of signs that we can be reconciled and live together as one humanity, caring for the life of the one earth, our common home. There is so much that we see and that could divide us, that creates conflicts, violence and wars. Even religion is misused for these purposes. Gaps between rich and poor, between peoples of different groups and races, remain and even increase. There is ongoing exploitation and destruction of our planet. And there are constant attacks on the dignity of human beings, undermining their rights and their chances to hope for a better future together in this world.

We should be united in our hope for a shared and common future for all. We all have the right to hope.

Your Holiness, your visit is a sign of this hope we share. It is a milestone in the relations among the churches. We are here as representatives of different churches and traditions from all over the world. As representatives of the World Council of Churches, we are a fellowship of churches, coming from different confessional traditions, contexts and continents. Where you are present, you represent the Roman Catholic Church as it exists in all places and among all peoples. You came from one “end of the world,” from the far south, as you said when you were elected. We are here together as women and men, young and old, from South and North, East and West. (I myself came from the north, from a land that, from the centres of the ancient world, was seen as “outside of the world,” beyond all boundaries.)

This city, this house, with its chapel and hall, have been granted to us as a place to meet, sharing our life together as pilgrims. We pause here to reflect, to pray, to work and to find our way forward together.

The motto for our meeting reflects also the life of the World Council of Churches through its history. By walking, praying and working together during these last 70 years, we have learned much about what it means to be a fellowship of churches. That is also how the relationships has developed between the WCC and the Roman Catholic Church after more than 50 years of cooperation.

But why not live and do our tasks separately? one may ask.

The answer is simple: “The love of Christ compels us.” “The love of Christ moves us on,” as we read in our Holy Scriptures (2 Cor 5:14). We are called to the ministry of reconciliation – to be reconciled with God and to be reconciled with one another. We are called to be peacemakers. To make peace is holy work. We work for a just peace. This is our task as Christians, this is our task as churches in the world today.

We want to share this task with all people of good will, together with communities of faith or those without a religious faith, together with institutions, organizations, missions and others here in Geneva – and elsewhere in the world - that are working for justice and peace for all.

The “real-politik” of the Church of Jesus Christ is always a matter of love. It is the beginning and the end of all we should say and do together. It is the motivation given by God for the one mission of God – pursued in the one ecumenical movement. We should not let anything or anybody – and particularly not our differences as churches - deter us from aspiring to and doing what fulfils this missional imperative.

Likewise, the dialogues between us have been dialogues of both truth and love. We are making one another mutually accountable, raising the same question to one another again and again: How is the love of Christ moving us on? How do we express our unity?

The one ecumenical movement is called to give a single, joint answer. It must be a different answer than the powerful are giving, something other than care for our own interests. We should continue to call one another as churches to visible unity.

We are called to use our learning from this common ecumenical journey in the struggles we have today not only as churches but as one humanity. These struggles go on in the many places of the world – represented by all who are here today - where people are longing and struggling for

reconciliation, for justice and peace. Our expressions of unity today should be for the benefit of all our churches, and for all our people - in every corner of the world.

Your Holiness, you have in many ways through your ministry shown your commitment to this holy ministry of unity, serving justice and peace, going outside the comfort zones of the Church. Your leadership is a strong sign of how we can find expressions of this unity in *diakonia* and mission, “walking, praying and working together.”

I believe that this motto of our meeting also captures the profound dynamism of this moment, of today. There is now a momentum building, with more and deeper expressions of our unity in Jesus Christ. There is a new momentum in our one ecumenical movement facing the reality of a divided humanity and the suffering creation. Those words summarize well the profile of the work of the World Council of Churches and many of our partners today as “Being together on a Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace.”

Pilgrimage is a journey together in faith, hope and love. Together with you we mutually recognize our one baptism in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. We continue to work toward a common understanding of the Church. We are committed to do the mission of the Church from the margins. We bring the churches together for joint peace initiatives in many places in the world. We address the situation of refugees. We raise issues of economic justice and address poverty. We work hard together to combat climate change and other threats to our environment. We promote inter-faith dialogues and initiatives for peace. We mobilize together for the Sustainable Development Goals. We prepare the annual prayers for Christian unity together.

In many of these tasks we work with the Pontifical Council to Promote Christian Unity (PCPCU), under the leadership of Cardinal Kurt Koch, who also has worked tirelessly for this meeting to happen. We are committed to doing more together with you and with other representatives in the Roman Catholic Church. We hope that this day will inspire many new initiatives for collaboration all over the world, in many different contexts.

It has taken 70 years to come to where we are today. This day is a landmark. We will not stop here. We will continue, we can do much more together for those who need us. Let us make it possible for the next generations to create new expressions of unity, justice and peace – as we share more and more together.

Like you, Your Holiness, we believe that Jesus Christ is walking with us, and will stay with us as we discover new places to meet and to share the gifts of God.