



World Council of Churches

General Secretariat

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To:
WCC Member Churches
Members of Central Committee
Associate Councils
Christian World Communions
Regional Ecumenical Organizations
Specialized Ministries
International Ecumenical
Organizations

*How good it is, how wonderful to live together in unity.
Love and faith come together.”
(Based on Psalm 133)*

Dear sisters and brothers,

Warm greetings in the name of our common Lord Jesus Christ.

The central committee of the World Council of Churches (WCC) met in Trondheim, Norway, 22-28 June 2016, considering the theme of “Pilgrimage: Discerning the Landscape Together,” and the implications and effect of global affairs on the ministry and witness of the WCC. In the opening session, Her Excellency Linda Cathrine Hofstad Helleland, Minister of Culture of Norway, welcomed the committee by reminding those assembled that:

“Pilgrimage is a spiritual journey. It is a search for peace. It is also about an openness to change. On this journey, we do not ignore our past nor our differences. Instead, we use them in our search for a common multi-religious future. We cannot separate the problems of the world from our faith.”

Engaging the church in the adversities of humanity is central to the heart of the Christian tradition as each of our churches seek to bring the Gospel message to all people. By way of this letter, it is my intention to provide you with a summary of our deliberations.

Links are provided below to resource material drawn from the meeting highlights, including the moderator’s address, the general secretary’s report, news releases, video playlists, and photos. I hope these resources are useful in engaging your constituents and members in the broader service, mission, and ministry of the WCC.

Address of the moderator:

<http://www.oikoumene.org/en/resources/documents/central-committee/2016/moderators-address-to-wcc-central-committee>

Report of the general secretary:

<http://www.oikoumene.org/en/resources/documents/central-committee/2016/a-fellowship-of-hope>

News releases from the Central Committee meeting 2016:

http://www.oikoumene.org/en/central-committee-2016/news?b_start:int=0

Video playlist: WCC Central Committee meeting 2016:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oXauh9KFUOk&list=PLI22eVXX9FYmJohFrHZaIV3Qjvgr18RYh>

Photos from the WCC central committee meeting:

<https://photos.oikoumene.org/pages/search.php?search=%21collection4531&k=ebb5f5e085>

Reports, addresses, statements, minutes, resolutions, and other important documents of the meeting are posted on-line at:

<http://www.oikoumene.org/en/resources/documents/central-committee/2016>

In the event you are unable to access these resources or additional documents referred to in this letter, the WCC general secretariat will be pleased to provide them for you.

Membership matters

WCC membership grows to 348 member churches

It is with gratitude and joy that the central committee welcomed three new member churches into the WCC fellowship. The new members are:

The **Dutch Reformed Church** [South Africa], founded in the 17th century by Dutch settlers in Southern Africa, includes more than one million members and three theological faculties. A founding member of WCC, the church broke its relationship with WCC in the 1960s, due to harsh criticism from the ecumenical fellowship on the church's involvement in and support of apartheid. Beginning in 1986, the church rejected all forms of racism and opened its membership to all believers and was gradually accepted in the confessional and ecumenical families.

The **Church of Central Africa Presbyterian Blantyre Synod** [Malawi] was established in the 19th century by Scottish missionaries and includes 1.8 million members in 800 local congregations.

The **Council of Baptist Churches in North East India** is one of the largest Baptist groups in India, comprised of 1.2 million members in 7,263 congregations. American Baptist Missionaries initiated the mission in 1836. Today, the church has six regional conventions as participating bodies in northeastern states.

Applications for membership

The central committee accepted the applications of two churches to join the WCC fellowship. In conformity with the WCC Constitution and Rules, the applications of these two churches were accepted for an interim period of participation in the work of the WCC and for interaction with the local fellowship of member churches (*cf.* Rule I.5) This

period is, normally, the interval between two central committee meetings. Therefore, the final decision for accepting these churches into full WCC membership will be made at the next meeting of the central committee in 2018. The applicants include:

The **Africa Brotherhood Church** [Kenya] was founded in 1945 by several brotherhoods that had received the Gospel mainly from the Africa Inland Mission. The church currently has 159,193 members in 916 local congregations.

The **Community of Baptist Churches in Central Africa** [Democratic Republic of Congo] was founded in 1927 by an American missionary society named Unevangelized Africa Mission and became independent in 1964. Present in the eastern part of the DRC; the church currently has over 500,000 members in 418 recognized congregations and 300 outposts.

As members of the WCC fellowship, you are invited to actively participate in developing the consensus of member churches in favour of these applications, so that the central committee, in June 2018, can assess whether a consensus of the member churches has developed in favour of each one of the above-mentioned applications, in which event each of the two applicant churches shall be considered a new member church. (cf. WCC Rule I. 5)

Plenaries and other highlights

The **Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace** plenary highlighted the most visible initiatives of the pilgrimage since its inception after the 10th Assembly in 2013. The focal point of the pilgrimage in 2016 is peacebuilding in the context of religion and violence in the Middle East, with a focus on Palestine and Israel.

The plenary on **Unity and Growing in a Common Vision of the Church** reaffirmed the church's vital importance in addressing the questions of "what is the state of the ecumenical quest for Christian unity? How does it relate to work for justice and peace? What can we say about the church in this context?" The Faith and Order Commission continues to receive responses from member churches on the convergence statement ***The Church: Towards a Common Vision***. All submissions are requested by 30 December 2016.

The plenary **Toward the churches' renewed commitment for justice and peace in the Middle East** brought a stark reminder of the continuing impact of war, ethnic conflict, massive refugee migration and a deteriorating humanitarian situation. The plenary rendered voices of both deep concern and hope. Voices such as Dr Tarek Mitri of the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Antioch, who said, "Ethnic groups, and religious groups, are both actors and victims of identity politics" across the Arab world; and "One has enough reasons to fear that many countries will continue to descend into disintegration, violence, and chaos. However, there are changes at work that could open the way for regeneration." Mr Henry Fawzi of the Coptic Orthodox Church saw signs of hope in the millennials, who signal the arrival of a new generation of activists in the Middle East. "Global networks of outrage and hope," he said, "defending the same universal values and struggling against oppression," presage long-term victory of inclusive governance, human rights and an openly pluralistic religious life.

The plenary on **A Pilgrimage of justice and peace with children as actors of change** brought a celebration of the gifts we receive through children and the role played by churches throughout the centuries in protecting and nurturing them. It also visited the many wounds in the lives of children and the many failures to address their basic needs. The plenary led to a first draft of the statement of “principles for child-friendly churches” and captured the imagination and heart of the central committee. The document will undergo further revision and be resubmitted at the next WCC executive committee meeting.

Additional highlights of the meeting included:

- Affirmation that racism remains an endemic global issue requiring the attention of the ecumenical movement.
- Support for continued dialogue on “religion and violence” in an effort to strengthen the churches’ role in peace-building.
- A call to accelerate the ecumenical response to HIV to defeat the root causes of transmission and continue advocacy, accompaniment and spiritual support of people living with HIV.
- Commending the study document “Gift of being”, affirming the dignity of all and encouraging the full inclusion of persons with disabilities in church and society.

Actions on public issues

A Statement on the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict and Peace Process – The central committee reflected on the situation of the churches and societies of the Middle East, the threatened presence and witness of Christians throughout this region, and on the long and unfulfilled search for peace with justice for Israelis and Palestinians, noting that next year – 2017 – will mark a painful anniversary: 50 years since Israel began its occupation of East Jerusalem, the West Bank, the Gaza Strip and the Golan Heights. The central committee called Israeli and Palestinian leaders to actively and immediately pursue the implementation of a just, viable and sustainable solution to the conflict, by providing a political horizon for an end to occupation and for a just and sustainable peace for both Palestinians and Israelis.

A Statement on Religion and Violence - The central committee encouraged the study and adoption of the principles and practices of active non-violence, as the most legitimate and appropriate means of countering discrimination and oppression and of breaking the cycle of violence.

A Statement on the Forced Displacement Crisis - The central committee called for more concerted and coordinated international action to resolve the root causes of forcible displacement of people.

Human Trafficking and Migrant Smuggling – The minute reaffirms, calls, urges, and encourages “its member churches to be attentive to peoples and organizations working to combat human trafficking and migrant smuggling, particularly in their struggle against organized crime.”

Puerto Rico in need of urgent help – The WCC has called on the US government to address the dire financial situation of Puerto Rico, a US territory, and for the US Congress “to enact a rescue plan urgently.”

Invitation to prayer for the United Kingdom and Europe in the wake of “Brexit” referendum – The central committee of the WCC has invited its member churches “to pray for God’s guidance and wisdom for religious, political leaders in the UK, in Europe and around the world” following the 23 June referendum in which a majority of voters in the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland chose to end the UK’s 43-year membership in the European Union.

A Statement on the Ceasefire agreement in Columbia – The statement “welcomes the news of the historic bilateral ceasefire agreement concluded by the government of Colombia and the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC-EP) in Havana on 23 June 2016.”

Resolution on the outcome of the Indigenous Peoples’ Conference – The resolution encourages member churches and partners to address realities of injustice in their contexts through processes of reconciliation; to urge solidarity with Indigenous Peoples in combatting racism; and to call the ecumenical community to protect God’s creation by acting to counter climate injustice.

Programme

Strategic Plan: In 2014 the central committee approved the WCC Strategic Plan 2014-2017, which reflects the commitment of the fellowship of member churches to stay together, pray together and move together on a pilgrimage of justice and peace. The strategic plan guides the life and work of the council until the next assembly. The strategy includes two four-year periods, 2014 to 2017 and 2018 to 2021, with a mid-term evaluation at the end of the first period.

In Trondheim, the central committee received a progress report on the implementation of the strategy. The initial review affirms that the strategy has contributed to developing a focused, integrated and results-oriented approach to WCC work. Preliminary results indicate that the council has strengthened its focus on the fellowship and the involvement of member churches and ecumenical partners. More and more activities are planned and implemented together with churches and partners. The work of the council in the area of public witness and peace-building is increasingly pursued in an inter-religious context.

These two focal points of fellowship and public witness help the council to be more effective in its mission, as in many cases, it is the fellowship of member churches that bears witness to the Christian calling to promote justice and peace in the world.

The central committee appointed an evaluation team and approved terms of reference and a timeline for preparing the mid-term evaluation and the renewal of the strategic plan for action by the central committee in 2018. The mid-term evaluation will help to assess how the strategic plan enhances the relevance and achievements of the WCC as a fellowship of churches calling one another to visible unity and engaged in a common pilgrimage of justice and peace.

The central committee received with appreciation the report of the Pilgrimage of justice and Peace Reference Group and commended that the ***Invitation to the Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace*** be sent to the churches for further study and implementation. The central committee recommended that the WCC secretariat and member churches initiate a series of “pilgrim-teams of justice and peace” to visit churches and regions, providing accompaniment and solidarity.

The central committee amended, adopted and commended to member churches for further study the document prepared by the EDAN network: ***The Gift of Being – Called to be the Church of All and for All.***

The central committee also amended and adopted a pastoral letter ***Churches Recommit to Accelerate HIV Response.***

The direction of the Council’s work on just community of women and men was affirmed (as presented in the report of the Gender Advisory Group), and the executive committee, commissions and reference groups were requested to study the relevant recommendations and to report back to the central committee in 2018 on actions taken.

2018 World Mission Conference in Tanzania: The conference will be held in Arusha, Tanzania from 8 to 13 March 2018. The conference theme is “Moving in the Spirit: Called to Transforming Discipleship.” More than 700 delegates from churches worldwide are expected to gather for the event hosted by the churches in Tanzania.

11th Assembly: All member churches are invited to consider hosting the next assembly, and to announce their interest to the general secretary by 1 November 2016. The central committee document GEN PRC02 *On the way to the WCC 11th Assembly*, includes as an appendix *Specifications for considering potential venues*, which will be of assistance to churches considering hosting the assembly.

The assembly planning committee was encouraged to set expectations regarding a simple and sustainable style and tone for the next assembly, keeping in mind the cultural context in which the assembly will take place.

The executive committee will monitor the process of the venue search, and the decision on the venue will take at the next central committee in 2018. The selection of the assembly theme will also be made following deliberations at that same meeting.

The finance policy committee reviewed a preliminary financial plan for the assembly fund, for the period 2018-2021, which indicated a possible event cost of CHF 4.7 million, should funding partners contribute at almost the same level as in 2012-2013. It was noted that although WCC’s total cost for the 10th Assembly was CHF 5.7 million over four years, including preparatory work of almost CHF 0.9 million, the financial contribution to the 10th Assembly by the Korean churches was estimated at CHF 2.3 million, at least, covering the venue, local transport and other services.

Finance

The income and expenditures of the WCC continue to be carefully monitored and managed. In January 2015, the Swiss National Bank ceased its policy of supporting the Swiss franc/Euro exchange rate. As a result, the value of contributions in Swiss francs decreased by about 7%, or CHF 1.5 million. While this created a challenge, we were quickly able to implement a revised budget, which was later adopted by executive

committee in June 2015. Gratitude is expressed in particular to those partners who responded to an appeal at that time to help counteract the adverse currency impact.

The solidarity of member churches and other ecumenical partners is expressed in the continued active engagement in our shared work, as we face together the challenges of the global economy. We continue this Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace learning from each other, and discerning the diverse ways in which contributions are offered in the context of each community.

From our recent work in managing the financial challenge, we report three key outcome indicators as signs of hope and good stewardship. Firstly, in two consecutive years, 2014 and 2015, the WCC has reported an increase to its funds and reserves. Secondly, in 2015, the Bossey conference centre and guest house reported a surplus result for the first time, meeting the target set in the financial strategic plan. Thirdly, we started 2016 with general reserves at the target set by central committee, and forecast maintaining that target going forward.

In 2015, income totaled CHF 25.6 million. In 2016, the budget reflects a similar level, which we are also projecting for our framework income for 2017. The finance policy committee reviewed three scenarios for 2018-2021, and recommended that the strategy for 2018-2021 should be developed based on the same stable income level.

The financial report 2015 of the World Council of Churches and its appendix detailing income and expenditure on activities by programme issued in April 2016 are available for download via the following link:

<https://www.oikoumene.org/en/resources/documents/other/wcc-financial-report-2015>

Real Estate Development: The finance policy committee reported on the progress of the real estate development project. Three strategic options are being considered, each of which meets the long-term financial objectives of the WCC. The options included owning different buildings, and therefore selling optional configurations of buildings.

During the summer months of 2016, independent professionals will be asked to present opinions on the information supplied by Implenia, the WCC's development partner, and to clarify tax ramifications for the WCC, along with the interpretation of laws and regulations related to the project. This risk assessment would be received by the steering committee in November 2016, with intentions to arrive at strategic project decisions by the end of the year, when the Area Development Plan is expected to be approved.

The finance policy committee received the report and concurred with the general direction of the work of the steering committee.

Additionally, the central committee delegated to the leadership of central committee decisions related to sales and long-term leases of land or buildings based on the recommendations of the WCC steering committee for real estate development projects and the decision of the executive committee. It was also approved that the joint signing authority for long-term lease transactions related to land and buildings be the general secretary, plus two additional signatures from the moderator and the vice moderators.

Elections – Nominations

The rotation and membership of the **WCC executive committee**, serving from 2018 to 2021, was approved as per the decision of the 10th Assembly. For the new composition of the executive committee, with new members in boldface, see:

<https://www.oikoumene.org/en/press-centre/news/new-executive-committee-members-elected-in-trondheim>

The WCC Central Committee appointed **Rev. Frank Chikane**, a member of the Apostolic Faith Mission of South Africa (Pentecostal), as the new moderator of the Commission of the Churches on International Affairs (CCIA).

Bishop Petra Bosse-Huber, from the Evangelical Church in Germany, was appointed as the new moderator of the Programme Committee of the World Council of Churches Central Committee.

Staffing

As two senior colleagues are retiring, Rev. Dr Hielke Wolters, associate general secretary with responsibility for unity, mission and ecumenical relations, and Mr Georges Lemopoulos, deputy general secretary, the central committee elected:

Prof. Dr Isabel Apawo Phiri as deputy general secretary (beginning in January 2017) with responsibility for Public Witness and Diakonia; and

Fr Prof. Dr Ioan Sauca as deputy general secretary (beginning in January 2017) with responsibility for Unity, Mission, and Ecumenical Relations as well as Ecumenical Formation.

The executive committee additionally approved the appointment of a director of the office of the general secretariat. This position will provide direct support for the daily operations of the general secretariat and will strengthen programme management and development. It was my privilege to introduce **Mr Stanley J. Noffsinger**, former general secretary of the Church of the Brethren (USA) as the appointee to this position (beginning in September 2016).

Next governance meetings:

The next meeting of the executive committee will occur 17-23 November, 2016 in Shanghai and Nanjing, China. The central committee convenes again 15-21 June 2018 in Geneva.

Conclusion

A great blessing at each central committee meeting is to witness the service of young adult stewards. This meeting was no exception with seventeen stewards facilitating many aspects of the meeting. A mentoring program was introduced for the first time, pairing a central committee member with each young adult (stewards and advisors). The value and importance of the initiative were well expressed by Rev. Christopher Eupha of the Moravian Church in Jamaica who reported to his mentor at the close of the meeting that;

“working in relationship with a central committee member helped me to understand the importance of the meeting and for the continuous unity of the World Council of Churches and the members of these churches worldwide. As a young adult, the meeting and mentorship show that in spite of our diversity, we can all still work together once we have a common purpose. Commonality amongst differences can bring unity and togetherness. These are aspects of the ministry of Christ and the church I will be employing wherever I pastor.”

Rev. Euphfa and his mentor continue to correspond since the close of the meeting.

The WCC is a fellowship of churches, working to build relationships and friendships around the world. This one instance of a new friendship in Christ exemplifies the hope, aspiration, and fulfillment of the pilgrimage of justice and peace.

In conclusion, I want to extend special words of appreciation to the Church of Norway: the Presiding Bishop, the Council on Ecumenical and International Relations and the Diocese of Nidaros. We also thank Norwegian Church Aid, the Municipality of Trondheim and the County of Sør-Trøndelag for their financial support. To the Ministry of Culture who provided financial support to host this sizeable international gathering in Trondheim, Norway we are most grateful. Their enthusiastic support, management of local logistics and inclusion of local churches provided central committee members with gracious hospitality in an environment of generous service. Our meetings and fellowship were blessed by our hosts' generosity.

Thank you for your continued interest, commitment and prayer for the work, mission, service, and fellowship of the WCC.

Yours in Christ,



Rev. Dr Olav Fykse Tveit
General Secretary