

Seoul Statement

Seoul International Consultation on Revitalizing Ecumenical Movement
November 13~15, 2008, Seoul, Korea

The Earth belongs to God and all of its abundance,
And so too the World and all of its inhabitants. (Ps.24:1)

Dear Friends and Co-workers in God's Oikoumene,
Greetings in the name of our Saviour Jesus Christ!

We are a group of ecumenical leaders who have come together in Seoul, Korea, for a three day consultation to consider the revitalization of the ecumenical movement and of the World Council of Churches in particular at this time of crisis. We meet with the understanding that the earth with all of its abundance and the world (oikoumene) with all of its inhabitants belong to God and that as co-workers in God's oikoumene we are accountable to God.

We meet in the context of the ongoing global financial crisis, which bears directly upon our attempts to read the signs of the time. We ask whether the flawed nature of the neo-liberal ideology of globalization is not now obvious to everybody, when the only remedy to a crippling cessation of credit is sought in further borrowing by governments to shore up faltering financial institutions. At this critical time we ask whether our churches and our ecumenical institutions have imbibed too deeply from the culture of the free market in financial and administrative matters and made uncritical accommodations with the ideology of unlimited and exponential economic growth.

We note as a most ominous feature of the US government and its allies the development of the theory as well as the practice of world domination by military means, with explicit disregard for international law and with preparations for the use of nuclear weapons. In this situation, we ask whether our churches and our ecumenical bodies are ready to respond saying that war in all its forms as a means of settling disputes is totally unacceptable, taking into account the fact that it is civilians, especially women and children, who are most at risk. We also ask how we can all respond with appropriate urgency to the looming catastrophe brought on by global warming and the ecological crisis.

At this time, we note with dismay the crisis in the World Council of Churches. We also feel the need for a fresh vision and a new sense of direction for the WCC. The main purpose of this consultation, however, is not to enter into a debate on the present state of an institution we have all served and continue to love, but to seek a refreshed vision together for the revitalizing of the ecumenical movement and to set meaningful goals.

With this concern in mind we make the following affirmations:

1. We affirm the prophetic ministry of the WCC.

The WCC has defined itself as a fellowship of churches and a frontier movement. As such, at critical times, it has been called upon to make appropriate statements and take decisive actions to lead the churches. In exercising its prophetic ministry, we ask

whether the consensus method for making decisions, as currently exercised, is the most appropriate. Has it not blunted the prophetic ministry of the WCC?

2. We affirm the AGAPE (Alternative Globalization addressing people & earth) document and its call to prophetic resistance.

We regret that the Porto Alegre Assembly of WCC did not make room in its programme for a serious debate of this document and heed its call to resistance to totalizing systems, particularly neoliberal globalization and empire. The process has gone on to include the challenge of ecological debt. The whole issue needs to be linked to the work of the Decade to Overcome Violence (DOV) so that the economic, ecological and military violence of empire is at the heart of DOV.

3. We affirm the WCC as a fellowship of churches.

Intrinsic to this fellowship is clear communication between the WCC and its member churches. This requires transparency and reciprocity. We have often been confused by the interpretative accounts of the WCC that have appeared in the Ecumenical News International (ENI) and other third party publications and fail to hear what the WCC itself is saying and how it is receiving communications from churches about their concerns.

4. We affirm the financial integrity of the WCC.

Market forces and the demands of donor agencies seem to vitiate the financial integrity of the WCC, making it sway to market forces and the desires of funding agencies so that it is not permitted to act independently. Previous experiences with the Programme to Combat Racism (PCR) and the Commission of the Churches Participation in Development (CCPD) have shown that timely and controversial action rather than diminishing financial support has in fact brought in fresh financial resources. To cite recent examples we have the Ecumenical Accompaniment Programme in Palestine and Israel (EAPPI) and the 'living letters' solidarity visits. Our consultation is also a case in point in that we have received from local congregations and individual Christians all the financial resources needed.

5. We affirm the need for renewed ecumenical formation.

Ecumenism as a perspective at local, national, regional and global levels needs to be strengthened. At this time, ecumenism is more than the narrow concern of churches and Christians. There is a wider ecumenism emerging with inter-religious conversations and joint actions for justice, peace and the integrity of creation. Ecumenical formation with this wider consciousness is required at all levels.

6. We affirm local ecumenical organizations and actions.

Global ecumenism needs the support of local ecumenical bodies and ventures. It is these that translate global concerns such as globalization, market forces and the reality of Empire to the people who are most affected. Global bodies such as the WCC need their support in a common prophetic ministry and to draw the churches to affirm this ministry.

We offer these affirmations with the prayer that they may contribute to a refreshing of the ecumenical vision for our time.

Appendix I

GROUP REPORTS

I. Prophetic Ministry of WCC and Role of Consensus

1. We affirm and encourage the essential prophetic voice and ministry of the WCC for the spiritual health of the ecumenical movement and solidarity with the suffering of the world.
2. We affirm the need to respond to the call of the Spirit through discernment enabled by the consensus method of decision making. We underline that consensus seeks to respond to the call of the Spirit. It is not a response to the consensus between church leadership.
3. We recognize that while consensus decision making can be prophetic, frequently it is vulnerable to a veto or manipulation as it is still operated within a parliamentary system. The consequence of this is a diminished prophetic voice of the WCC in the world today.
4. Recognizing that the prophetic voice of the WCC is valued in certain contexts even over against the voice of the church leadership, we call on the WCC to continue to discern the prophetic voice of the Spirit.

II. Communication

1. Positive ecumenical communication both creates and relies upon our sense of connection in the one body of Christ and our common humanity. The WCC plays a leadership role within the ecumenical movement, along with many companion groups and organizations (explicitly Christian and otherwise). For us the primary communication remains personal, as in the Living Letters program. We need to continue to highlight the voices of the primary communicators within the ecumenical movement, the leaders and those who bring messages of truth and of hope. The voice of ecumenical leaders needs to be heard by local congregations as well as by national churches and councils. We continue to be constrained by translation needs and by appropriate media (audio as well as print and electronic).
2. For communication with the wider world, we need interfaces which assist credibility. ENI may play a role in this respect for church-based and even secular media. There is a similar role to be played, for example, by ECHOS, the youth committee accompanying the WCC Central Committee and communicating 'in the language of today'.
3. We conclude that the priority for communications should be the building up of the solidarity of the ecumenical movement as a diverse community of suffering, struggle and hope.

III. Financial Life of Ecumenical Movement

Whereas we realize that our churches in their financial life are deeply implicated and accommodated to the regime of neo-liberal global market,

Whereas we discern that the current financial crisis impacts seriously our churches, missions and ecumenical institutions in their financial life as well as the people in the world,

Whereas financial resources for ecumenical institutions are reduced due to church tax reduction among European churches and due to “fragmented localism” of church support for missions, and due to further weakening of financial life,

It is proposed to take radical steps:

1. To free from the ecumenical movement to be independent of financial powers and structures that dominate the movement and to distort its priorities of the ecumenical movement.
2. To intensify church to church sharing as an ecumenical discipline, intensifying ecumenical communication, to use communication technology to strengthen ecumenical communication for connecting churches with one another and for financing the ecumenical movement, and to restore the movement character of ecumenism to broaden the basis for financial support.
3. To launch the ecumenical tithing on all levels, individual, local churches and national churches.
4. To study new and alternative ways to support ecumenical movement and to set up an appropriate infrastructure for mutual and interactive communication.

IV. Ecumenical formation

1. We are convinced that ecumenical formation is at the heart of the revitalization of the ecumenical movement. In the course of the reorganizations that took place in response to financial constrains some of the key concerns like Laity, Congregational Renewal, Youth Concerns etc. have not received the importance they deserve. It is therefore necessary to create programs that remedy the need for formation.
2. In order to have an effective program of formation we should have a clear vision of the movement’s goals and challenging and relevant program priorities that become the vehicles of formation.
3. Formation is needed at all levels: Church leaders, clergy, Laity, Youth etc. Each group calls for different approach to the issue.
4. One of the most important areas of formation is theological education. We need to work with Associations of Theological Schools, Institutes and Seminaries to find ways to incorporate ecumenism, ecumenical concerns and ecumenical theology into theological curriculum.
5. We must use the modern media towards the formation of young people. We suggest that a well prepared youth consultation be called of young people to explore how the internet could be used to bring about ecumenical formation, and towards communication and net-working.

6. In view of the current situation further exploration needs to be made as to how the ecumenical institute in Bossey could do more innovative programs towards formation of the churches.
7. We recommend the mobilization of local churches to fund formation programs in their own counties like, ecumenical pastors conferences, lay leadership conferences etc.

V. AGAPE, Empire and DOV

Reaffirming the biblical imperative of prophetic resistance to all forces of oppression; and seriously taking note of the ecumenical movement's ambiguity and lack of prophetic clarity on critical issues like neoliberal globalisation and empire, we propose the following:

1. that WCC create, fund and facilitate a new network of local groups engaged in struggles for justice, peace and life, linking other ecumenical organisations, different faith communities and social movements in order to broaden the resistance against the destructive forces of neoliberal globalisation and empire as well as looking for alternatives; that; in addition, WCC provide a platform for these groups and networks to challenge and support each other at the international level;
2. that WCC exercise its prophetic ministry by unequivocally facing controversial issues and working them out – particularly the conflict around the issue of empire, ecological debt and the document on Alternative Globalisation Addressing People and Earth (AGAPE) that has divided our churches and ecumenical organisations largely along North and South fault-lines;
3. that WCC make sure that the Decade to Overcome Violence (DOV) gives priority to resistance against both the structural violence of the global economy and the direct violence of imperial wars, especially the war on terror;
4. that WCC ensure work in all the above programs include the deep dimensions of a new life-giving civilisation, including the gifts of non-Western cultures like *Ubuntu* (an expression of human relations lived in community and in harmony with the whole of creation), *Sangsaeng* (an ancient Asian concept of a sharing community and economy which allows all to flourish together) and indigenous traditions, in order to overcome socially, ecologically and psychologically destructive dominating systems.
5. That WCC reclaim its integrity and the right to set its own ecumenical agenda by resisting pressures from those who have control over the funding. *We cannot and must not allow the availability or absence of funds to determine what we can and cannot do.*

Appendix II

Participants At the Seoul International Consultation for Revitalization of Ecumenical Movement

International Participants

1. Dr. Soritua Albert Ernst Nababan, President, WCC, Indonesia
2. Pasteur Simon Kossi Dossou, President, WCC , Benin
3. Bishop George Mathew, Chairperson, WCC-CWME, India
4. Dr. Clifton Kirkpatrick, President, WARC, USA
5. Rev. Dr. Setri Nyomi, General Secretary, WARC, Ghana
6. Dr. Preman Niles, Former General Secretary, CWM, Sri Lanka
7. Prof. Ulrich Duchrow, Professor, Heidelberg University, Germany
8. Rev. Gabriel Habib, Former General Secretary, Middle East Council of Churches, Lebanon
9. Dr. Ninan Koshy, Former Director, WCC-CCIA, India
10. Mrs. Susan Ninan, India
11. Ms. Lydia Siahaan, Member, Executive Committee, LWF, Indonesia
12. Ms Carmencita Karagdag, Central Committee Member, WCC, the Philippines
13. Rev. Igor Vyzhanov, Central Committee Member, WCC, Russian Orthodox Church, Interchurch Relations, Russia
14. Rev. Graham Gerald McGeoch, Central Committee Member, WCC, United Kingdom
15. Bishop Dr Owdenburgh Moses Mdegella, Central Committee Member, WCC, Tanzania
16. Prof. Wesley Ariarajah, Professor at Drew University, Former Director, WCC-Interfaith relations, Sri Lanka
17. Rev. Sandy Yule, Professor at Melbourne University, Australia
18. Rev. Larry Pickens, Central Committee Member, WCC, USA

Korean Participants

19. Dr. Kang Moon-Kyu, Former President, WCC, Chairperson, Global Sharing NGO
20. Rev. Kim Joon-Young, Former Central Committee Member, WCC
21. Rev. Park Sang-Jung, Former Executive Secretary, WCC-CWME, Former General Secretary, CCA, Chairperson of the Board, Beautiful Foundation
22. Dr. Ahn Jae-Woong, Former General Secretary, CCA, Executive Director, Foundation for Working Together
23. Prof. Dr Park Kyung-Seo, Former Asia Secretary, WCC, Professor at Ewha Women's University
24. Dr. Samuel Lee, Former Executive Committee member, WCC, Former General Secretary, Korea UNESCO Commission
25. Dr. Kim Yong-Bock, Former Vice Moderator, WCC-CCPD, Former Moderator, Department of Theology, WARC, President, Asia Pacific Graduate School for Integral Study of Life
26. Prof. Dr. Park Seong-Won, Professor at YoungNam Presbyterian Theological

- University, Central Committee Member, WCC
27. Dr. Oh Jae-Shik, Former Director, WCC-JPIC, Director, Asian Education Center
 28. Prof. Chang Yoon-Jae, Ewha Women's University
 29. Rev. Cho Hun-Jung, Hyangrin Presbyterian Church
 30. Rev. Kim Oh-Sung, General Secretary, KSCF
 31. Rev. Dr Kim Won-Bae, Mokpo Yewon Presbyterian Church
 32. Prof. Han Gook-Il, Professor at Presbyterian Theological University and Seminary
 33. Rev. Byun Chang-Bae, Coordinator, Seoul International Consultation
 34. Prof. Dr. Jung Byung-Jun, Visiting Professor at Han Nam University
 35. Mr. Yoon Shin-Young, Executive Secretary, People Making True Peace Foundation
 36. Rev. Cheon Young-Cheol, Advanced Institute for Integral Study of Life

Contributors by papers and letters

37. Prof. Ofelia Ortega, President, WCC, Vice-President, WARC, Cuba
38. Prof. Philip Wickeri, Professor at San Francisco Theological Seminary, USA
39. Rev Wolfgang Schmidt, former President, Basel Mission; Former Executive Secretary, WCC-CCPD, Germany
40. Prof. Damayanthi M. A. Niles, Professor at Eden Theological Seminary, USA.
41. Prof. Volker Kuester, Professor at Theological University of Kampen, Netherlands
42. Prof. James Noel, Professor at San Francisco Theological Seminary, USA.
43. Prof. Rev. Carmen Lansdowne, Central Committee Member, WCC, United Church of Canada, Canada
44. Rev. Dr. Matthew V. Johnson, National Executive Director, Every Church A Peace Church, Atlanta, GA, USA.
45. Rev. Philip Wood, Council for World Mission, United Kingdom

Appendix III

Supporters and Visitors to the Seoul International Consultation

46. Rt. Rev. Kim Sam-Hwan, President, KNCC, Moderator, Presbyterian Church of Korea
47. Rev. Cho Sung-Gi, General Secretary, Presbyterian Church in Korea
48. Rev. Kwon Oh-Sung, General Secretary, KNCC.
44. Rev. Jung Ji-Kang, President, The Christian Literature Society of Korea
45. Rev. Kimm Bo-Hyun, Kidokgongbo (PCK Weekly Newspaper)
46. Mr. Lee Sung-Han, Kukmin Ilbo (daily newspaper)
47. Rev. Lee Keun-Bock, KNCC
48. Ms. Chung Hae-Sun, KNCC, Central Committee Member, WCC
49. Rev. Bae Kyung-Im, KNCC
50. Rev. Kim Kyung-In, Ecumenical Relations, Presbyterian Church in Korea
51. Rev. Son In-Woong, President, Korea Pastors' Association
52. Rev. Bae Tae-Duck, General Secretary, Korea Pastors' Association
53. Rev. Ahn Ki-Sung, Changham Presbyterian Church
54. Rev. Jung Kang-Gil, Korea Pastors' Association
55. Rev. Jung Byung-Hwa, Korea Pastors' Association
56. Rev. Kim Il-Jae, Ahchundong Church
57. Rev. Han Kyung-Kyun, Missionary in Philippines
58. Rev. Ryu Tae-Sun, Yongsan Presbyterian Church
59. Rev. Kim Jong-Saeng, Korea Churches Social Service
60. Rev. Jung Min-Cheol, Ilsan Kwangsung Presbyterian Church
61. Rev. Bak Nam-Woong, Hyojadong Presbyterian Church
62. Rev. Han Hong-Suk, Yonsei Church
63. Rev. Choi Won-Tak, Hyunam Church
64. Rev. Kim Dong-Mun, Wansan Church
65. Rev. Shin Jung-Ho, Dongshin Church
66. Rev. Jeon Jung-Shik, Sandol Church
67. Rev. Hae Yang-Soo, Daesung Church
68. Rev. Lee Kwang-Ik
69. Rev. Kang Bock-Keun, Chonju Somang Church
70. Rev. Lee Jong-Yun, Busanjin Church
71. Rev. Kim Min-Shik, Dongkwang Church
72. Rev. Cha Jong-Sun, President, Honam Theological Seminary
73. Prof. Kim Hyung-Min, Honam Theological Seminary
74. Prof. Jung Jong-Hun, Yonsei University
75. Rev. Dr Song Jae-Shik, Seorim Church
76. Rev. Kim Young-Cheol, Seminjok Church
77. Rev. Ahn Kwang-Duck, Seongsanpo Church
78. Prof. Kim Byum-Tak, Ahjoo University

Staffs

79. Rev. Dr Kim Dong-Sung, Saemunan Presbyterian Church
80. Mr. Kim Sam-Jin, Youngnam Theological Seminary
81. Ms. Kim Nam-Kyung, Youngnam Theological Seminary
82. Rev. Choi Sung-Shin, Volunteer
83. Ms. Joo So-Ra, Mokmin Foundation