

# Message of the 10th Assembly of the WCC

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## Join the Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace

*By the tender mercy of our God,  
the dawn from on high will break upon us,  
to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death,  
to guide our feet into the way of peace.  
Luke 1:78-79*

Dear Sisters and Brothers, we greet you in the name of Christ.

1. We gathered in the Republic of Korea at the 10th Assembly of the World Council of Churches (30 October – 8 November 2013). Coming from 345 member churches of the fellowship and from partner organizations in the ecumenical movement, we joined in prayer, shared stories from our local communities and took to heart strong messages of agony and hope. We are thankful for the many engaging statements released. Our common pilgrimage traced the theme “God of life, lead us to justice and peace.”

2. In the city of Busan, we journeyed together on a road of transformation – we pray that as we are being transformed ourselves, God will make us instruments of peace. Many of us travelled to other parts of Korea where we witnessed the open wounds of a society torn by conflict and division. How necessary is justice for peace; reconciliation for healing; and a change of heart for the world to be made whole! We were encouraged by the active and committed churches we encountered; their work bears bountiful fruit.

3. We share our experience of the search for unity in Korea as a sign of hope in the world. This is not the only land where people live divided, in poverty and richness, happiness and violence, welfare and war. We are not allowed to close our eyes to harsh realities or to rest our hands from God’s transforming work. As a fellowship, the World Council of Churches stands in solidarity with the people and the churches in the Korean peninsula, and with all who strive for justice and peace.

4. God our Creator is the source of all life. In the love of Jesus Christ and by the mercy of the Holy Spirit we, as a communion of the children of God, move together towards the fulfillment of the Kingdom. Seeking grace from God we are called, in our diversity, to be just stewards of God’s Creation. This is the vision of the New Heaven and Earth, where Christ will “fill all in all” (Eph 1.23).

5. We live in a time of global crises. Economic, ecological, socio-political and spiritual challenges confront us. In darkness and in the shadow of death, in suffering and persecution, how precious is the gift of hope from the Risen Lord! By the flame of the Spirit in our hearts, we pray to Christ to brighten the world: for his light to turn our whole beings to caring for the whole of creation and to affirm that all people are created in God’s image. Listening to voices that often come from the margins, let us all share lessons of hope and perseverance. Let us recommit ourselves to work for liberation and to act in solidarity. May the illuminating Word of God guide us on our journey.

6. We intend to move together. Challenged by our experiences in Busan, we challenge all people of good will to engage their God-given gifts in transforming actions.

This Assembly calls you to join us in pilgrimage.

May the churches be communities of healing and compassion, and may we seed the Good News so

that justice will grow and God's deep peace rest on the world.

*Blessed are they who observe justice,  
who do righteousness at all times!*  
*Psalm 106:3*

**God of life, lead us to justice and peace!**

# Unity Statement

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## God's Gift and Call to Unity - and our Commitment<sup>1</sup>

1. "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth (Genesis 1:1)." Creation is a gift from the living God. We celebrate creation's life in its diversity and give thanks for its goodness. It is the will of God that the whole creation, reconciled in the love of Christ through the transforming power of the Holy Spirit, should live together in unity and peace (Eph.1).

## Our experience

2. Today, the whole creation, the world and its people, live in the tension between the profoundest hope and the deepest despair. We give thanks for the diversity of human cultures, for the wonder of knowledge and learning, for the enthusiasm and vibrancy of many young people, for communities being rebuilt and enemies reconciled, for people being healed, and populations fed. We rejoice when people of different faiths work together for justice and peace. These are signs of hope and new beginnings. But we grieve that there are also places where God's children cry out. Social and economic injustice, poverty and famine, greed and war ravage our world. There is violence and terrorism and the threat of war, particularly nuclear war. Many have to live with HIV and AIDS and suffer from other epidemics; peoples are displaced and their lands dispossessed. Many women and children are victims of violence, inequality and trafficking as are some men. There are those who are marginalised and excluded. We are all in danger of being alienated from our cultures and disconnected from earth. Creation has been misused and we face threats to the balance of life, a growing ecological crisis and the effects of climate change. These are signs of our disordered relations with God, with one another and with creation, and we confess that they dishonour God's gift of life.

3. Within churches we experience a similar tension between celebration and sorrow. There are signs of vibrant life and creative energy in the growth of Christian communities around the world with rich diversity. There is a deepening sense among some churches of needing one another and of being called by Christ to be in unity. In places where churches experience anguish and constant fear of persecution, solidarity between Christians from different traditions in the service of justice and peace is a sign of God's grace. The ecumenical movement has encouraged new friendships forming a seed bed in which unity can grow. There are places where Christians work and witness together in their local communities and new regional agreements of covenanting, closer fellowship and church unions. Increasingly, we recognize that we are called to share with, and learn from, those of other faiths, to work with them in common efforts for justice and peace and for the preservation of the integrity of God's beautiful but hurting creation. These deepening relationships bring new challenges and enlarge our understanding.

4. We grieve that there are also painful experiences of situations where diversity has turned into division and we do not always recognise the face of Christ in each other. We cannot all gather together around the Table in Eucharistic communion. Divisive issues remain. New issues bring sharp challenges which create new divisions within and between churches. These must be addressed in the fellowship of churches by the way of consensus discernment. Too easily we withdraw into our own traditions and communities refusing to be challenged and enriched by the gifts others hold out to us. Sometimes we seem to embrace the creative new life of faith and yet do not embrace a passion for

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<sup>1</sup> This Unity Statement was adopted by the WCC 10th Assembly on 8 November 2013. It is based on a draft statement on Christian unity presented in 2012 to the WCC Central Committee.

unity or a longing for fellowship with others. This makes us more ready to tolerate injustice and even conflicts between and within the churches. We are held back as some grow weary and disappointed on the ecumenical path.

5. We do not always honour the God who is the source of our life. Whenever we abuse life through our practices of exclusion and marginalization, our refusal to pursue justice, our unwillingness to live in peace, our failure to seek unity, and our exploitation of creation, we reject the gifts God holds out to us.

### **Our shared scriptural vision**

6. As we read the Scriptures together, under the guidance of the Spirit, our eyes are opened to the place of the community of God's people within creation. Men and women are created in the image and likeness of God and given the responsibility to care for life (Gen. 1:27-28). The covenant with Israel marks a decisive moment in the unfolding of God's plan of salvation. The prophets call God's covenanted people to work for justice and peace, to care for the poor, the outcast, and the marginalized, and to be a light to the nations (Micah 6:8; Isaiah 49:6).

7. God sent Jesus Christ, the Incarnate Word of God (John 1). Through his ministry and through his death on the cross Jesus destroyed the walls of separation and hostility, established a new covenant, and brought about genuine unity and reconciliation in his own Body (Eph. 1:9-10 and 2:14-16). He announced the coming Kingdom of God, had compassion on the crowds, healed the sick and preached good news to the poor (Math. 9:35-36; Luke 4:14-24). He reached out to the despised, the sinners, the alien, offering acceptance, and redemption. By his life, death and resurrection, and through the power of the Holy Spirit, Jesus revealed the communion of the life of God the Holy Trinity, and opened to all a new way of living in communion with one another in the love of God (1 John 1:1-3). Jesus prayed for the unity of his disciples for the sake of the world (John 17:20-24). He entrusted his message and his ministry of unity and reconciliation to his disciples and through them to the Church, which is called to continue his mission (2 Cor. 5: 18-20). From the beginning the community of believers lived together, were devoted to the apostolic teaching and fellowship, breaking bread and praying together, caring for the poor, proclaiming the good news and yet struggling with factions and divisions (Acts 2:42; Acts 15).

8. The Church, as the Body of Christ, embodies Jesus' uniting, reconciling and self-sacrificial love to the world on the cross. At the heart of God's own life of communion is forever a cross and forever resurrection – a reality which is revealed to us and through us. We pray and wait with eager longing for God to renew the whole creation (Rom. 8:19-21). God is always there ahead of us in our pilgrimage, always surprising us, calling us to repentance, forgiving our failures and offering us the gift of new life.

### **God's call to unity today**

9. On our ecumenical journey we have come to understand more about God's call to the Church to serve the unity of all creation. The vocation of the Church is to be: foretaste of new creation; prophetic sign to the whole world of the life God intends for all; and servant spreading the good news of God's Kingdom of justice, peace and love.

10. As foretaste God gives to the Church gracious gifts: the Word, testified to in Holy Scripture to which we are invited to respond in faith in the power of the Holy Spirit; baptism in which we are made a new creation in Christ ; the Eucharist, the fullest expression of communion with God and with one another, which builds up the fellowship and from which we are sent out in mission; an

apostolic ministry to draw out and nurture the gifts of all the faithful and to lead the mission of the Church. Conciliar gatherings too are gifts enabling the fellowship, under the Spirit's guidance, to discern the will of God, to teach together and to live sacrificially, serving one another's needs and the world's needs. The unity of the Church is not uniformity; diversity is also a gift, creative and life-giving. But diversity cannot be so great that those in Christ become strangers and enemies to one another, thus damaging the uniting reality of life in Christ.

11. As prophetic sign the Church's vocation is to show forth the life that God wills for the whole creation. We are hardly a credible sign as long as our ecclesial divisions, which spring from fundamental disagreements in faith, remain. Divisions and marginalisation on the basis of ethnicity, race, gender, disability, power, status, caste, and other forms of discrimination also obscure the Church's witness to unity. To be a credible sign our life together must reflect the qualities of patience, humility, generosity, attentive listening to one another, mutual accountability, inclusivity, and a willingness to stay together, not saying 'I have no need of you' (1 Cor. 12:21). We are called to be a community upholding justice in its own life, living together in peace, never settling for the easy peace that silences protest and pain, but struggling for the true peace that comes with justice. Only as Christians are being reconciled and renewed by God's Spirit will the Church bear authentic witness to the possibility of reconciled life for all people, for all creation. It is often in its weakness and poverty, suffering as Christ suffers, that the Church is truly sign and mystery of God's grace.

12. As servant the Church is called to make present God's holy, loving and life affirming plan for the world revealed in Jesus Christ. By its very nature the Church is missionary, called and sent to witness to the gift of communion that God intends for all humanity and for all creation in the Kingdom of God. In its work of holistic mission - evangelism and diakonia done in Christ's way - the Church participates in offering God's life to the world. In the power of the Spirit, the Church is to proclaim the good news in ways that awaken a response in different contexts, languages and cultures, to pursue God's justice, and to work for God's peace. Christians are called to make common cause with people of other faiths or none wherever possible, for the well-being of all peoples and creation.

13. The unity of the Church, the unity of the human community and the unity of the whole creation are interconnected. Christ who makes us one calls us to live in justice and peace and impels us to work together for justice and peace in God's world. The plan of God made known to us in Christ is, in the fullness of time, to gather up all things in Christ, "things in heaven and things on earth (Ephesians 1:9-10)."

## **Our commitment**

14. We affirm the place of the Church in God's design and repent of the divisions among and within our churches, confessing with sorrow that our disunity undermines our witness to the good news of Jesus Christ and makes less credible our witness to that unity God desires for all. We confess our failures to do justice, to work for peace, and to sustain creation. Despite our failings, God is faithful and forgiving and continues to call us to unity. Having faith in God's creating and re-creating power, we long for the Church to be foretaste, credible sign and effective servant of the new life that God is offering to the world. It is in God, who beckons us to life in all its fullness that joy, hope, and a passion for unity are renewed. Therefore, we urge one another to remain committed to the primary purpose of the fellowship of churches in the World Council of Churches:

to call one another to visible unity in one faith and in one Eucharistic fellowship, expressed in worship and common life in Christ, through witness and service to the world and to advance towards that unity in order that the world may believe.

We affirm the uniqueness of our fellowship and our conviction to pursue the visible unity of the Church together, thankful for our diversity and conscious of our need to grow in communion.

15. In faithfulness to this our common calling, we will seek together the full visible unity of the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church when we shall express our unity around the one Table of the Lord. In pursuing the unity of the Church we will open ourselves to receive the gifts of each other's traditions, and offer our gifts to one another. We will learn to commemorate together the martyrs who witnessed to our common faith. We will continue theological conversations, giving attention to new voices and different methods of approach. We will seek to live out the consequences of our theological agreements. We will intensify our work for justice, peace and the healing of creation, and address together the complex challenges of contemporary social, economic and moral issues. We will work for more just, participatory and inclusive ways of living together. We will make common cause for the well-being of humanity and creation with those of other faith communities. We will hold each other accountable for fulfilling these commitments. Above all, we will pray without ceasing for the unity for which Jesus prayed (John 17): a unity of faith, love and compassion that Jesus Christ brought through his ministry; a unity like the unity Christ shares with the Father; a unity enfolded in the communion of the life and love of the Triune God. Here, we receive the mandate for the Church's vocation for unity in mission and service.

16. We turn to God, the source of all life, and we pray:

O God of life,  
lead us to justice and peace,  
that suffering people may discover hope;  
the scarred world find healing;  
and divided churches become visibly one,  
through the one who prayed for us,  
and in whom we are one Body,  
your Son, Jesus Christ,  
who with you and the Holy Spirit,  
is worthy to be praised, one God,  
now and forever. Amen.

# Statement on the Human Rights of Stateless People

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Nationality is a fundamental human right which is affirmed in article 15 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and is a foundation of identity, human dignity, and security. Nationality is an essential prerequisite to the enjoyment and protection of the full range of human rights.

Currently, there are more than 10 million people around the world who live without any nationality: they are stateless people. Most of these stateless people have not left their country of origin.

Statelessness can occur for a number of reasons. Some relate to technical aspects of nationality laws and procedures for acquisition of documents which prove nationality. More often, however, the cause is discrimination. Minorities are often arbitrarily excluded from citizenship due to discrimination on racial, ethnic, religious or linguistic grounds.

This kind of discrimination in the nationality law has rendered stateless more than 800,000 Rohingya, an ethnic Muslim minority living in Rakhine State, despite their ties to Myanmar that date back centuries. Over the past 30 years, the Rohingya have been subjected to widespread discrimination including the denial of citizenship, denial of freedom of movement and the right to marry. They have suffered forced labour and detention. As a result of discriminatory conditions inside the country, more than 200,000 Rohingya have fled to neighbouring Bangladesh, though fewer than 30,000 are officially recognized as refugees. Most unregistered Rohingya live in unofficial makeshift refugee settlements, where shelters are falling apart, and malnutrition is widespread. In spite of these conditions, aid agencies have sometimes been denied permission to assist unregistered refugees. Without residence or work permits, unregistered refugees live in fear of detention and forced repatriation to Myanmar. The lack of documentation also makes Rohingya women and girls particularly vulnerable to physical attacks, sexual violence and trafficking. Rohingya populations are also found in the Gulf countries and many have made the perilous sea journey to other countries in Asia – or have died trying.

The Bhutanese in Nepal – also called Lhotshampas – are another example of stateless people. These descendants of Nepalese migrants who settled in Southern Bhutan in the late 1890's were originally recruited by the Government of Bhutan to clear the jungles of southern states. In 1958, the Bhutanese government passed the Citizenship Act, which granted the Lhotshampas Bhutanese citizenship. However, in the 1980s, Bhutanese authorities adopted a series of policies known as “Bhutanisation”, aimed at unifying the country under the Buddhist Druk culture, religion, and language. After the 1988 census the Lhotshampas were re-classified as ‘illegal immigrants’ and the government established new requirements for citizenship that deprived many ethnic Nepalese of their nationality. By 1991, many tens of thousands had fled to India, with most going on to Nepal. Over half of the 110,000 Bhutanese refugees in Nepal have now been resettled to third countries while the remainder continue to live in camps in wait of a solution.

In Côte D'Ivoire, hundreds of thousands of people descended from migrant workers brought to the country in colonial times have been denied Ivorian citizenship because they are deemed ‘foreigners’ and not eligible for nationality. This discriminatory treatment was a root cause of the continual conflict there. The government is now taking steps to resolve the situation of many of the people affected.

The 2004 Dominican government General Law on Migration put an end to the automatic right of Dominican nationality to be granted to Dominicans of Haitian descent. The law was applied retroactively, turning all children born of Haitian immigrant parents, who had arrived in the country 50 or 60 years back, stateless. Amendments to the constitution of the Dominican Republic in 2010 established new standards of citizenship along the same lines. Recently, on 23 September 2013, the constitutional court of the Dominican Republic has declared that the children of undocumented Haitian migrants in the country, even those who were born on Dominican soil decades ago, are no longer entitled to citizenship. This situation is now affecting the status of tens of thousands of people in the Dominican Republic who have never been part of any other nationality. This ruling denies Dominican nationality to anyone born after 1929 who does not have at least one parent of Dominican blood.

In addition to being often stigmatized and discriminated against, a great number of Roma people scattered in different European countries are stateless. Their lack of nationality, and therefore of identity documents and of administrative existence, hinders their access to basic human rights such as education and health services, registration of birth or marriage, etc., and increases their vulnerability to continued marginalization.

With regard to the Russian-speaking population in Latvia, although a Russian minority existed on the territory before Soviet times, approximately half a million former Soviet citizens who found themselves on Latvian territory were rendered stateless by being deemed “non-citizens” by Latvia’s 1994 citizenship law.

Statelessness can also arise when citizenship laws do not treat women and men equally. Over 25 countries in Africa, Asia, the Americas and the Middle East continue to prevent mothers from passing their nationality on to their children on an equal basis as fathers. Where fathers are stateless, absent, or unable to confer their nationality to their children, these children are left stateless.

State succession is also a cause of widespread statelessness where individuals fail to secure citizenship in successor states. For example, when the former Soviet Union, Yugoslavia and Czechoslovakia broke up, large numbers of people throughout Central and Eastern Europe, Central Asia and the Balkans became stateless. Migrants and marginalised ethnic and social groups were most affected.

Stateless people are present in every region of the world. Many migrants become stateless after they have left their countries and find themselves stranded – without nationality – through no fault of their own. Several thousand people from Myanmar, the former Soviet Union and Yugoslavia and many other places are stateless in the United States. The fact that they are stateless and thus unable to travel to and reside legally in another state does not give rise to protection under U.S. immigration law. It is therefore almost impossible for people without nationality to obtain residency or citizenship in the United States unless they are recognized as refugees. Many end up in immigration detention where they can remain for prolonged periods – even though there is no hope of them travelling to any other country.

Similar hardships caused by statelessness are faced by a range of populations around the world, including children of Haitian descent in the Caribbean, or people known as “bidoon” who did not acquire nationality when Kuwait achieved independence. This being said, some countries, such as Zimbabwe, have made efforts and have tried to address the issue of statelessness through legislation change.

Stateless people live in a situation of legal limbo. Without protection from any state, stateless people are often exploited and – particularly women and children – may be more vulnerable to smuggling,

harassment, and violence. Since they are not recognized and registered as citizens of any country, stateless people are also denied concomitant rights such as the right to reside legally, to register the birth of a child, to receive education and medical care and to access formal employment and housing. Stateless people are also often not allowed to own property, to open a bank account, or to get married legally. Stateless people face constant travel restrictions as well as social exclusion. Due to the lack of citizenship in any country, our stateless sisters and brothers face numerous daily hardships – needless separation from their families, and fundamental uncertainty about what their lives might hold or the ability to pursue their hopes and ambitions.

As a result, not only are stateless persons denied their rights and faced with living in limbo, but their situation is rarely recognized by mainstream society. The feeling of being invisible leads to a debilitating sense of desperation. As a result of their plight, many stateless persons are forced to cross international borders and become refugees.

Because states have the sovereign right to determine the procedures and conditions for acquisition and loss of citizenship, statelessness and disputed nationality can ultimately only be resolved by governments. State determinations on citizenship must, however, conform to general principles of international law enshrined in the 1961 Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness and human rights treaties such as the Convention on the Rights of the Child which set out basic rights such as the right of every child to acquire a nationality and the principle of non-discrimination. The 1954 Convention relating to the Status of Stateless Persons establishes standards of protection for stateless persons. Together, these treaties establish the international framework for the protection of stateless people and for the prevention and reduction of statelessness.

The church's engagement with human rights has a long theological tradition. The underlying theological assumption of active concern for those who are suffering is the belief that all people created by God constitute an inextricable unity. Solidarity and compassion are virtues that all Christians are called to practice, regardless of their possessions, as signs of their Christian discipleship. Compassion and care for one another and acknowledging the image of God in all humanity is at the core of our Christian identity and an expression of Christian discipleship. Humanitarian conduct is an essential part of the Gospel. We are instructed in Micah 6:8 to “do justice.” And the commandment of love, the greatest commandment of our Lord Jesus Christ, is to love God and to love one another.

The word of God cautions the Hebrew people: “You shall not wrong a stranger or oppress him, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt.” (Ex. 22:21). Jesus through the Nazareth Manifesto in Luke 4:18-19 also gives expression to God's reign of justice, liberation, and well-being of all. His parable of the judgment of sheep and goats also draws pointed attention to being in solidarity with people who are discriminated, marginalized and suffering (which would include stateless people and minority groups): “I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me.” (Matt.25:35-36).

These biblical and theological bases motivate us as churches and Christian bodies to express our Christian commitment and to be engaged in our prophetic witness to speak for the rights of those who are voiceless and marginalized as stateless people. The Christian family, therefore, ought to take up the plight of stateless persons as this struggle reflects our cardinal universal principles and values: that a human being has the right to life, liberty and security; the right to education, equal protection under the law, and to be free from slavery and torture; the right to freedom of thought, conscience, and religion, and to freedom of opinion and expression; and the right to a nationality. Stateless persons are denied all of these rights and are unrecognized by any nation.

**Expressing deep concern on the plight of stateless people around the world, the 10th Assembly of the World Council of Churches meeting in Busan, Republic of Korea, from 30 October to 8 November 2013, therefore:**

- A. Affirms** that the right to life, security and basic human rights are fundamental universal principles and values that every human being is entitled to;
- B. Recognizes** that the denial of nationality is a major violation of human rights which affects people in every region;
- C. Encourages** churches to raise awareness of the situation of stateless people living in their countries and around the world and to advocate for the protection of their human rights;
- D. Calls** on churches to engage in dialogue with states to adopt policies which confer nationality and provide proper documentation to stateless people;
- E. Acknowledges** positive changes in nationality laws made by some governments, and encourages other states to take similar actions;
- F. Urges** churches, civil society, human rights entities as well as United Nations agencies and regional organisations to collaborate in order to properly and effectively reduce and eradicate statelessness;
- G. Prays** for stateless people around the world, so that their voices are heard and their plight understood; and
- H. Requests** the WCC to take up the issue of stateless people as one of its programmatic priorities until the forthcoming WCC 11th Assembly.

# Statement on the Politicization of Religion and Rights of Religious Minorities

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As Christians we confess the dignity accorded to all human beings by God the creator. This forms the basis for a Christian understanding of human rights. We consider freedom of religion a foundational and distinctive human right of particular importance. We want to acknowledge with gratefulness that in many contexts the importance of religious freedom as expressed in Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) is acknowledged and safeguarded as a right for all to experience.

The World Council of Churches (WCC), from its inception, has consistently expressed its concern regarding the freedom of religion. The WCC through its Commission of the Churches on International Affairs (CCIA) engages member churches through various initiatives in addressing specific situations of freedom of religion and human rights. However, the WCC has never dealt with the issue of the right to religious freedom in isolation. The first WCC assembly in 1948 stated its conviction regarding “freedom of religion as an essential element in good international order” and also affirmed that in “pleading for this freedom, Christians do not ask for any privilege to be granted to Christians that is denied to others”. The Tenth Assembly meeting in Busan during the year of the 1700<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the issuance of the Edict of Milan granting tolerance to Christians and all religions reiterates its commitment to religious freedom. The WCC has upheld these principles during the past decades of its struggle for religious freedom and human rights.

Over the years, the WCC has adopted different statements addressing questions related to freedom of religion and human rights as well as responses to specific situations of denial of the right to religious freedom. In recent years the WCC has been concerned about the alarming trend of growing instances of hatred, intolerance and discrimination based on religion or belief in different parts of the world where religious minorities have been forced to live in vulnerable circumstances. There have been a number of instances reported in recent years from different parts of the world on a rise in the denial of religious freedom to religious minorities. It is in this context that the WCC has taken several initiatives during the past three years specifically to address problems related to the rights of religious minorities.

## **Freedom of Religion: an inherent human right**

Respect for freedom of religion should be treated as an inherent human right and political virtue which is a fundamental prerequisite for the democratic and peaceful progress of human society. Freedom of religion cannot be enjoyed without equality and justice. There can be no real freedom without equality and there can be no equality without the potential inclusion and participation of all citizens in any society. An adequate Christian understanding of human rights emphasizes freedom, equality and participation as embodiments of human rights. Freedom of religion is based on the intrinsic dignity of a human being, who is endowed by God with reason and free will. The cardinal principle of right to religious freedom, besides being a natural human right and a civil right, is rooted in biblical teaching and a theological emphasis of human dignity. We reiterate our affirmation that all human beings are created in the image of God, and Jesus Christ is the one in whom true humanity is perfectly realized.

The presence of the image of God in each human person and in the whole of humanity affirms the essentially relational character of human nature and emphasizes human dignity. Widespread and

grievous violations of this freedom affect the stability, security and development of any society and severely impact upon the daily lives of individuals, families and communities and the wellbeing of the society. It is therefore essential first to affirm that all people are endowed with inherent dignity. This is not only because human beings are made in the image of God (Gen. 1:26-27), but Christians make the further assertion of this universal and inherent value of all from a Trinitarian perspective.

The WCC has always recognized the significance of international human rights regimes and standards relating to the freedom of religion and belief. During the work of the United Nations while drafting the UDHR of 1948, the CCIA took an active role in formulating Article 18 of the UDHR which articulates “Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; this right includes freedom to change his religion or belief, and freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship and observance”. It contains normative core values which constitute the minimum standard that should be protected: inner freedom, external freedom including the propagation of one's religion, freedom from compulsion or coercion, freedom from discrimination, respect of the rights of parents and guardians and the right of the child to religious self-determination, as well as corporate freedom and legal status of religious bodies. This includes the right of conscientious objection as well as reasonable accommodation of employees' belief by employers.

This commitment was subsequently affirmed in the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, both of 1966. This was further expanded in the Declaration on the Elimination of all Forms of Intolerance and of Discrimination Based on Religion or Belief, of 1981. These rights also extend to those who do not profess a religion as their thought and conscience enjoy the same freedom. It is our firm conviction based on our theological underpinnings that human rights do not constitute a goal in themselves for protecting the interests or rights of only certain groups, but we see human rights show us the direction in which society should develop towards peace with justice. They are a vehicle enabling the life of everybody to acquire fuller and richer quality. It is in relation to life that all aspects of human rights must be assessed and in this context, the rights to freedom of religion and freedom of expression by individuals must be realized in every society.

We have reiterated the principles and values of freedom of religion and the duty of states and governing authorities to respect, protect and promote the freedom of religion or belief, in all its dimensions, for all individuals under their jurisdiction or control without regard to their religion or belief. It is with these convictions that the WCC emphasises the need to strengthen the existing protection mechanisms and devise effective safeguards against violations of national and international law relating to religious freedom. We are of the opinion that there should be concerted and coordinated efforts on the part of religious, civil society and state actors in order to protect the right to freedom of religion. In the current context, the fear is quite real that religious minorities may be further suppressed in certain countries by a rising wave of religious extremism. The rights of minority religious communities to live in peace and harmony amidst their neighbours belonging to majority religious communities is vital not only for the people belonging to faith minority groups but also for overall stability and democratic governance, especially in countries that are liberated from past elements of authoritarianism.

Rights of religious minorities in all contexts should be rooted in a democratic principle that majority and minority are to be treated as equal beneficiaries of the state, and that dignity and human rights of all people are respected and valued. Governments, religious communities, national and international human rights institutions and civil society organizations should play different roles in order to protect the rights of religious minorities and promote religious tolerance, especially when politicization of religion intensifies religious hatred and violates rights of religious minorities.

Violations of freedom of religion or belief against persons belonging to religious minorities, whether perpetrated by states or non-state actors, need to be combated, be it in forms of disinformation, discrimination or persecution. Individual and communitarian rights of people belonging to all religious minorities should be respected. This is what the United Nations Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief pointed out in his recent report, saying that, in keeping with the principle of normative universalism, “the rights of persons belonging to religious minorities cannot be confined to the members of certain predefined groups. Instead, they should be open to all persons who live *de facto* in the situation of a minority and are in need of special protection to facilitate a free and non-discriminatory development of their individual and communitarian identities”. The rights of persons belonging to all minority religious groups therefore should be treated as fundamental human rights.

### **Politicization of Religion and Religionization of Politics**

The contemporary world is witnessing a trend of politicization of religion. As religion occupies a more and more critical space in politics and public life, the politicization of religion and the religionization of politics have become pervasive phenomena in many parts of the world. The trend is that politicization of religion adds to political polarization, and hence the religious divide manifests itself in almost every corner of the globe. When religion becomes a dividing force in the social and political arena, in its more intensive and durable form, it can contribute to a religious chasm. Choosing political allies with more radical positions allows a religion better to defend its interests in the political arena so as to win a privileged position and favours from the government. In recent history we have witnessed the multifaceted trend of politicization of religion, but the flip side of this phenomenon, especially the impact of the religionization of politics, has not always been identified.

The religionization of politics, which destroys communal harmony and intensifies religious hatred, is simultaneously being instrumentalized for political purposes. The religionization of politics in this context ultimately leads politics to pander to the interests of religious groups and leaders who would like to influence and control political power. Religion is being used as an effective instrument in several countries during national elections in order to create specific vote banks, especially prior to elections. The problems, by and large, persist in the assumption that parties or movements are only successful if they invoke religious identity during elections. The strategies used by certain religious groups are to devise and carve roles for themselves in politics by way of invoking religious sentiments against other, minority religious groups. At the same time they position themselves as true champions of their religion which is under threat from minority religions and their foreign affiliation. When religion is used for political gain, relations between different religious communities are increasingly impacted by changes in local and national politics which have been largely reconfigured along particular religious lines. This trend also adds reasons for people of different religions to think in narrow terms of religious sentiments and consider that their religion is more prominent than others. The rising trend of the politicization of religion thus causes serious problems not only for Christians, but it affects different religious communities who live as minorities in many areas of the world. The politicization of religion and the rise of religious extremism in many societies mutually reinforce each other. It not only poses a threat to freedom of religion of the adherents to minority religions, but the survival of religious minorities is affected.

### **Rise in religious intolerance and discrimination against religious minorities**

We have observed with great concern several cases where the exercise of freedom of expression has been used as an excuse to violate freedom of religion for religious minorities. While the concept of “minority” is mostly a social and political construct, on a practical level these socio-political constructs can and do have a devastating effect on the group of people who lack the strength of numbers amid a “majority” religious community, although this situation is not restricted to religion alone.

While we recognize and indeed welcome the many positive steps taken towards a fuller respect for freedom of religion or belief in numerous contexts, we are also cognizant of the many serious violations of these rights which are of grave concern, such as the violation of the fundamental right to religious freedom by governments, individuals and majority religious groups. The continuing practices which limit the right to change one's religious status can result in the separation of families, material and social deprivation or even criminal prosecution, imprisonment or the death penalty. Anti-conversion provisions, which are open to misuse and contribute to negative public perceptions of, and violence towards religious minority communities, as found in the legislation of a number of countries should be reconsidered.

We note with concern the tendency in recent years that the discussion on freedom of religion and belief has focussed more on issues related to defamation of religion; this negates the spirit of the universally accepted norm of an individual's right to freedom of religion and belief. Moving to an approach that protects religions rather than people only undermines the basic human rights principles and international human rights standards as well as giving way to abuse laws in local contexts that persecute religious minorities. The provisions introduced in criminal procedures to misuse blasphemy laws in several countries are clear examples of this. Article 20 of the ICCPR lays down principles that "any advocacy of national, racial or religious hatred that constitutes incitement to discrimination, hostility or violence shall be prohibited by law". However, the trend is that "incitement to hatred" has been increasing, even in countries that have acceded to the ICCPR. Hence it has become a major concern that incidents which concern article 20 of the ICCPR are not being prosecuted and punished. At the same time a report of the Office of the United Nation's High Commissioner for Human Rights in 2012, "Rabat Plan of Action on the prohibition of advocacy of national, racial or religious hatred", observed that:

"the members of minorities are *de facto* persecuted, with a chilling effect on others, through the abuse of vague domestic legislation, jurisprudence and policies. This dichotomy of (1) no prosecution of "real" incitement cases and (2) persecution of minorities under the guise of domestic incitement laws seems to be pervasive. Anti-incitement laws in countries across the world may be qualified as heterogeneous, at times excessively narrow or vague; jurisprudence on incitement to hatred has been scarce and *ad hoc*; and while several states have adopted related policies, most of them too general and not systematically followed up, lacking focus and deprived of proper impact-assessments".

We see the danger that, as majority religious groups use their religion as a tool to influence the political system and political rulers, religious minorities living in the same societies are persecuted and discriminated against. Often their strategies lead to violence which threatens the very existence of the religious minorities. The alarming trend we note is that there are cases where a conflict in one place, with its local causes and character, is misinterpreted and instrumentalized as part of a conflict in another place, especially when extremist groups use religion to legitimize violence. However, it is heartening to note that the key role religion plays in conflict resolution, reconciliation and peace-building is often evident and recognized. In several countries in the world, people who identify themselves as being politically and economically excluded often feel that dominant religious groups which wield power apply discriminatory standards in dealing with minority rights issues such as freedom of religion. Although the reasons for the problems have their roots in socio-economic factors, social fragmentation and communal hatred, such actions may increase even in traditionally tolerant societies when religion is mobilized for political purposes. The prevailing situations, especially in Asia, Africa and the Middle East prove that religions can impact and influence the geo-political contexts of countries and regions. The new developments in the context of the "Arab Spring"

witnessed a number of groups and parties in the Middle East and North Africa ascend into dominant positions in the name of majority religion. In countries in the Middle East region such as Egypt, Syria, Iraq and Iran, religious minorities live in a situation of fear and insecurity.

There are instances that restrict or limit religious freedom of minority religious communities which have been observed in recent years in the United States, Canada, Latin America and the Caribbean as well as in certain European countries. In practice, the discrimination and intolerance against religious groups in these countries are evident in discourses and regulations introduced by governments that question or ban religious dress, symbols and traditions.

Religious minorities in various countries face discrimination on the basis of religion or belief. Discriminatory legislation and state practices provide a legitimatizing framework for wider discrimination in society. Deprivation, social exclusion and violence towards minorities are the inevitable results of systematic discrimination which threatens the social fabric of society. Numerous religious communities encounter problems in obtaining the legal status necessary to function, as well as in acquiring, building or maintaining properties such as places of worship and burial grounds or facilities. In particular, religious minorities in several countries are denied their rights in this regard. Discrimination against religious minorities is also seriously affecting their ability to access their rights to education, healthcare and employment and to participate in the political process. In many instances, educational syllabuses and text books portray negatively or under-represent the role of religious minority groups in society. This also serves to affirm existing societal prejudices and promote intolerance and discrimination. Obligatory religious education of children of minority religious backgrounds in the majority faith violates the rights of parents and children. Existing legislations and state practices with regard to mixed marriages in certain countries negatively impact the right to religious freedom in bringing up children of such marriages of people who belong to religious minorities.

The failure of states to protect religious minorities from violence threatens the survival of communities and is in violation of states' international obligations. The culture of impunity created by failures to investigate and prosecute crimes against members of minority communities in a number of countries is evident in the politicization of religion. For example, the inaction of government and failure to implement a proper law enforcement mechanism results in gradual erosion of a long-nurtured tradition of religious tolerance. This encourages a culture of politicization of religion which threatens the very existence of religious minorities. In a country like Pakistan, the politicization of religion by military dictatorships, introduced through changes in the penal code, systematized the misuse of the Blasphemy Law which is now a major instrument used by the religious extremists against the religious minorities in the country. The politicization of religion in the Indian context constantly threatens communal harmony and peaceful co-existence of people belonging to different faiths. Constitutional guarantees of the right to religious freedom face continual threat and minority religious groups are often under attack from religious extremist groups who try to mobilize religions and religious sentiments for political gains. The politicization of religion and the religionization of politics in different African nations intensify religious hatred, communal violence and political instability. Religious extremist groups of majority religions as well as political parties are responsible for creating such situations. Northern Nigeria, Tanzania, Sudan, Indonesia, Sri Lanka and Myanmar among others, provide examples of continuing violence in the name of religion and the spread of religious hatred. In certain other situations, ruling governments are using religion to wield the support of majority religions with an aim to create communal vote banks and political power. Often such actions lead to conflicts and violence, especially when governments deny religious freedom as well as when social and government restrictions on religion or a minority group are imposed. Some examples of cases where the WCC has been involved: In Malaysia, where objections to using the word "Allah" by Christians have exacerbated religious hatred and tension over the years,

pro-government political parties have been responsible for intensifying the controversy. The Methodist Church of Fiji has been denied its freedom to exist as a religious body and has been continuously denied permission to convene its national assembly in the country due to interference by the government. The government of the Former Yugoslavian Republic of Macedonia (FYROM) has categorically denied the Orthodox Archdiocese of Ochrid the right to registration as a religious body. The interference of the government in the country's legal system resulted in the illegal detention of the head of the church. Kosovo faced in recent times systematic destruction of over 100 Orthodox Christian shrines while leading to historical revisionism with regard to their cultural patrimony, threatening the very existence of the Serbian Orthodox faithful. In Albania Orthodox churches are not always adequately protected, with regard to recent incidents of extremely violent actions that have occurred during times of living worship.

The 10th Assembly of the World Council of Churches held in Busan, Republic of Korea, from 30 October to 8 November 2013, therefore:

- A. **Reaffirms** the commitment of the WCC to the principle of the universal right of all persons to freedom of religion or belief;
- B. **Reiterates** our conviction that the Church is an important element in promoting and defending religious freedom and rights of religious minorities, based on its historic values and ethos of upholding human dignity and the human rights of every individual;
- C. **Recognizes** and reiterates that the promotion and protection of freedom of religion or belief should be the concern and work of the churches and the ecumenical community as part of their prophetic witness;
- D. **Calls** upon WCC member churches to engage actively in defending the rights of all religious minorities and their right to freedom of religion or belief, especially in opposing legislation or regulations that would limit religious freedom in contravention of international human rights standards;
- E. **Recognizes** the positive steps being taken by various states towards a fuller respect for freedom of religion or belief in a number of contexts;
- F. **Expresses** grave concern on the increasing trend of politicization of religion and religionization of politics as well as the growing trend of terrorism that threaten the social fabric of a society and the peaceful co-existence of religious communities;
- G. **Expresses** grave concern on state interference in the decision-making processes of religious groups, and the imposition of religious law and jurisprudence through state sanctions;
- H. **Calls** upon the ecumenical community around the world to mediate with their respective governments to develop policies of providing effective protection of persons and communities belonging to minority religions against threats or acts of violence from non-state actors;
- I. **Calls** upon governments to strengthen the existing protection mechanisms and enact legislation to protect the rights of members of religious minorities and introduce effective measures and apply universal normative status regarding freedom of thought, conscience, religion or belief; including the right to change religion and to manifest your belief;
- J. **Urges** states to repeal criminal law provisions that misuse blasphemy laws, apostasy laws or anti-conversion laws to punish deviation from majority religions or to discriminate against religious minorities and violate their right to freedom of religion or belief;
- K. **Urges** states to implement anti-discrimination legislation to protect persons and communities belonging to different religions, especially to end discrimination and persecution for their faith or belief;
- L. **Commends** the UN for its advocacy of freedom of religion or belief and *calls* on the UN, especially the Human Rights Council, to give the same priority to freedom of religion or belief as is given to other fundamental human rights and to resist any attempts to weaken the principle of freedom of religion or belief;

M. **Calls** on the UN to strengthen the office of the Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief; and

N. **Calls** for concerted and coordinated efforts on the part of religious, civil society and state actors in order to address violations of rights of religious minorities and their freedom of religion and belief.

# Statement on the Way of Just Peace

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Just peace is a journey into God's purpose for humanity and all creation. It is rooted in the self-understanding of the churches, the hope of spiritual transformation and the call to seek justice and peace for all. It is a journey that invites us all to testify with our lives.

Those who seek a just peace seek the common good. On the way of just peace, different disciplines find common ground, contending worldviews see complementary courses of action, and one faith stands in principled solidarity with another.

Social justice confronts privilege, economic justice confronts wealth, ecological justice confronts consumption, and political justice confronts power itself. Mercy, forgiveness and reconciliation become shared public experiences. The spirit, vocation and process of peace are transformed.

As the Ecumenical Call to Just Peace (ECJP) stated, to take the path of just peace is to enter a collective, dynamic yet grounded process of freeing human beings from fear and want, of overcoming enmity, discrimination and oppression, and of establishing conditions for just relationships that privilege the experience of the most vulnerable and respect the integrity of creation.

## 1. TOGETHER WE BELIEVE

Together we believe in God, the Creator of all life. Therefore we acknowledge that every human being is made in the image and likeness of God and we seek to be good stewards of creation. In wondrously creating a world with more than enough natural riches to support countless generations of human beings and other living things, God makes manifest a vision for all people to live in the fullness of life and with dignity, regardless of class, gender, religion, race or ethnicity.

Together we believe in Jesus Christ, the Prince of Peace. Therefore we acknowledge that humankind is reconciled with God, by grace, and we strive to live reconciled with one another. The life and teachings, the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, point toward the peaceable kingdom of God. Despite persecution and suffering, Jesus remains steadfast in his way of humility and active non-violence, even unto death. His life of commitment to justice leads to the cross, an instrument of torture and execution. With the resurrection of Jesus, God confirms that such steadfast love, such obedience, such trust, leads to life. By God's grace we too are enabled to take the way of the cross, be disciples and bear the costs.

Together, we believe in the Holy Spirit, the Giver and Sustainer of all life. Therefore we acknowledge the sanctifying presence of God in all of life, strive to protect life and to heal broken lives.

Based on the teaching of St Paul (Romans 8:22) "For we know that the whole creation groans and labours with pain together until now", as explained by St Peter (2 Peter 3:13) "nevertheless we, according to His promise, look for new heavens and a new earth in which justice dwells", we can state that: the Holy Spirit assures us that the Triune God will perfect and consummate all of creation at the end of time. In this we recognize justice and peace as both promise and present – a hope for the future and a gift here and now.

Together, we believe that the Church is called to unity. Therefore we acknowledge that churches are to be just and peaceful communities reconciled with other churches. Grounded in the peace of God and empowered through the reconciling work of Christ, we can be "agents of reconciliation and peace with justice in homes, churches and societies as well as in political, social and economic

structures at the global level” (8<sup>th</sup> WCC Assembly, Harare, 1998).

## **2. TOGETHER WE CALL**

The way of just peace provides a basic frame of reference for coherent ecumenical reflection, spirituality, engagement and active peacemaking.

### **For just peace in the community – so that all may live free from fear**

Many communities are divided by economic class, race, colour, caste, gender and religion. Violence, intimidation, abuse and exploitation thrive in the shadows of division and inequality. Domestic violence is a hidden tragedy in societies everywhere.

To build peace in our communities, we must break the culture of silence about violence in the home, parish and society. Where religious groups are divided along with society, we must join with other faiths to teach and advocate for tolerance, non-violence and mutual respect, as Christian and Muslim leaders are doing in Nigeria with ecumenical support.

Local churches working for peace reinforce international church advocacy for peace, and vice versa. Ecumenical advocacy at the International Criminal Court is one reason why at least some war criminals today face justice in a court of law, a historic advance in the rule of law.

Churches can help build cultures of peace by learning to prevent and transform conflicts. In this way they may empower people on the margins of society, enable both women and men to be peacemakers, support non-violent movements for justice and human rights, support those who are persecuted for their refusal to bear arms for reasons of conscience, as well as offer support to those who have suffered in armed conflicts, and give peace education its rightful place in churches and schools.

### **For just peace with the earth – so that life is sustained**

Human beings are to respect, protect and care for nature. Yet our excessive consumption of fossil fuels and other resources is doing great violence to people and the planet. Climate change, only one consequence of human lifestyles and national policies, poses a global threat to justice and peace.

The World Council of Churches (WCC) was among the first to warn about the dangers of climate change. Now, after 20 years of advocacy, churches have helped bring ecological justice into the international debate on climate change. Concern for eco-justice is evident in the attention given to victims of climate change in international negotiations and at the United Nations Human Rights Council. The 10<sup>th</sup> WCC Assembly meeting in Busan strongly reiterated the ecumenical commitment to climate justice.

“Eco-congregations” and “green churches” are signs of hope. The churches and parishes of many countries around the world are linking faith and ecology – studying environmental issues, monitoring carbon output, and joining in WCC-led advocacy for governments to cut emissions of green-house gases. Some governments, such as the Seoul city government, are collaborating with local churches to help Korea’s sprawling capital conserve energy and recycle waste. In the wake of the Fukushima disaster, Christians and Buddhists already united against nuclear weapons are now united against nuclear power plants as well. They are raising a prophetic call for a nuclear-free world.

To care for God’s precious gift of creation, the reform of lifestyles and the pursuit of ecological

justice are key elements of just peace. Concerted ecumenical advocacy is needed so that governments, businesses and consumers protect the environment and preserve it for future generations.

### **For just peace in the marketplace – so that all may live with dignity**

There is something profoundly wrong when the wealth of the world's three richest individuals is greater than the gross domestic product of the world's 48 poorest countries. Such deep socio-economic injustice raises serious questions about economic growth which ignores social and environmental responsibility. Such disparities pose fundamental challenges to justice, social cohesion and the public good within what has become a global human community.

Churches should be strongly committed to economic justice. The WCC and its member churches join with peoples' movements and partners in civil society to challenge poverty, inequality and environmental degradation. The churches' analysis of wealth and poverty has led to an ecumenical emphasis on sufficiency and to a strong critique of greed. Some churches have now developed indicators to test how well individuals, corporations and nations are sharing God's abundant gifts.

Establishing "economies of life" is one key to building peace in the marketplace. Economies of life promote careful use of resources, sustainable production and consumption, redistributive growth, workers' rights, fair taxes, fair trade, and the universal provision of clean water, clean air and other common goods. Regulatory structures must reconnect finance not only to economic production but also to human need and ecological sustainability. Responding equitably to the different dimensions of fair labour is increasingly important in our times.

### **Just peace among the nations – so that human lives are protected**

History has seen great advances in the rule of law and other protections for humanity. Yet the present situation of the human race is in at least two ways quite unprecedented. Now as never before humanity is in a position to destroy much of the planet environmentally. A small number of decision makers are in a position to annihilate whole populations with nuclear weapons. Radical - threats of ecocide and genocide demand of us an equally radical commitment to peace.

There is great potential for peacemaking in the nature of who we are. Churches together in the WCC are well-placed for collective action in a world where the major threats to peace can only be resolved transnationally.

On that basis, a diverse network of member churches and related ministries advocated with success for the first global Arms Trade Treaty. The witness of churches in war-torn communities was heard in high places. Churches from different regions pressed governments from those regions to agree on a treaty to regulate the international arms trade for the first time. A similar approach is now building inter-regional support to make nuclear weapons illegal, a goal consistent with the Vancouver Assembly's indictment of the production, deployment and use of nuclear weapons as "a crime against humanity", and its challenge that "the nuclear weapons issue is, in its import and threat to humanity, a question of Christian discipline and of a faithfulness to the Gospel".

For peace among the nations, churches must work together to strengthen international human rights and humanitarian law, promote multilateral negotiations to resolve conflicts, hold governments responsible for ensuring treaty protections, help eliminate all weapons of mass destruction and press for reallocation of unnecessary military budgets to civilian needs. We must join other communities of faith and people of good will to reduce national military capacities and delegitimize the institution of war.

### 3. TOGETHER WE COMMIT

Peace constitutes a pattern of life that reflects human participation in God's love for all creation.

Together we commit to share God's love for the world by seeking peace and protecting life. We commit to transforming how we think about peace, how we pray for peace, how we teach peace to young and old and deepen our theological reflections on the promise and practice of peace.

Together we commit to building cultures of peace in families, the church and society. We commit to mobilize the gifts within our fellowship to raise our collective voice for peace across many countries.

Together we commit to protect human dignity, practice justice in our families and communities, transform conflicts without violence and ban all weapons of mass destruction.

We understand that the protection of life is a collective human obligation today as never before in history. We commit to turn away from planet-changing patterns of consumption as the engine of economic growth, and refuse to accept that any nation's security requires the capacity to annihilate other nations or to strike alleged enemies at will anywhere on earth.

We reaffirm the Ecumenical Call to Just Peace which states "While life in God's hands is irreplaceable, peace does not yet reign. The principalities and powers, though not sovereign, still enjoy their victories, and we will be restless and broken until peace prevails. Peacemakers will speak against and speak for, tear down and build up, lament and celebrate, grieve and rejoice. Until our longing joins our belonging in the consummation of all things in God, the work of peace will continue as the flickering of sure grace."

### 4. TOGETHER WE RECOMMEND THAT THE WORLD COUNCIL OF CHURCHES

- a. *Undertake*, in cooperation with member churches and specialized ministries, critical analysis of the "Responsibility to Prevent, React and Rebuild" and its relationship to just peace, and its misuse to justify armed interventions;
- b. *Lead and accompany* ecumenical just peace ministries and networks in the practice of violence prevention, non-violence as a way of life, collective advocacy and the advancement of international norms, treaties and law;
- c. *Encourage* its member churches to engage in cooperative interfaith programmes in order to address conflicts in multi-ethnic and multi-religious societies;
- d. *Request* its member churches and partners to develop communication strategies that advocate for justice and peace, proclaim the hope of transformation and speak truth to power;
- e. *Facilitate* a programme of reflection and environmental action in member churches and related networks to build sustainable communities and bring about collective reductions in carbon emissions and energy use; promote the use of alternate, renewable, and clean energy;
- f. *Develop* guidelines within the concept of "economies of life" for the right sharing of resources and the prevention of structural violence, establishing useable indicators and benchmarks; and
- g. *Convene* churches and related organizations to work for human rights protections through

international treaty bodies and the United Nations Human Rights Council; to work for the elimination of nuclear and all other Weapons of Mass Destruction, cooperating with the International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons; and to seek ratification of the Arms Trade Treaty by their respective governments and monitor its implementation.

h. *Reiterate* its existing policy (2009 study) and reaffirm its support for the human right of conscientious objection to military service for religious, moral or ethical reasons, as churches have an obligation to support those who are in prison because they object to military service.

## **5. WE RECOMMEND THAT GOVERNMENTS**

a. *Adopt* by 2015 and begin implementing binding regulations with targets for lowering greenhouse gas emissions consistent with the recommendations in the 2013 report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change;

b. *Negotiate and establish* a ban on the production, deployment, transfer and use of nuclear weapons in accordance with international humanitarian law;

c. *Ensure* that all remaining stocks of chemical weapons are destroyed under the terms of the Chemical Weapons Convention and cluster munitions are destroyed under the Convention of Cluster Munitions at the earliest possible date;

d. *Declare* their support for a pre-emptive ban on drones and other robotic weapons systems that will select and strike targets without human intervention when operating in fully autonomous mode;

e. *Reallocate* national military budgets to humanitarian and developmental needs, conflict prevention and civilian peace-building initiatives amongst others; and

f. *Ratify and implement* the Arms Trade Treaty (ATT) by 2014 and on a voluntary basis include weapon types not covered by the ATT.

*God of life, guide our feet into the way of just peace!*

# Statement on Peace and Reunification of the Korean Peninsula

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*“For he is our peace; in his flesh he has made both groups into one and has broken down the dividing wall, that is, the hostility between us.” (Eph. 2:14)*

We, the delegates of the 10th Assembly of the World Council of Churches (WCC) meeting in Busan from 30 October to 8 November 2013, bear witness to the suffering of the men, women and children of the one Korean people through decades of violence caused by war and hostility that have left them divided into two nations.

Division, war and the suffering contradict God’s will for the fullness of life. Therefore, we call upon the churches of the world, and upon those holding social, economic, political and governmental power, to pursue a lasting and sustainable peace with justice that will reunify and reconcile the people of Korea.

The central theme of our assembly is a simple prayer, “God of life, lead us to justice and peace.” It is our prayer that the vision and dream of all Koreans, their common aspiration for healing, reconciliation, peace and reunification may be fulfilled.

## **New Challenges to Reconciliation and Healing**

The present situation in the Korean peninsula prompts us to a renewed engagement in efforts to work for peace and justice throughout the region and for the reunification of a divided Korea. Despite many positive developments in the world during the post-Cold War era, the North East Asia region still contains the world’s heaviest concentration of military and security threats. Four of the five permanent members of the UN Security Council, who are also recognized nuclear weapons states, have military bases in this region. There are even signs of an emerging “new Cold War”, as the geopolitical map of North East Asia shows new shifts in the balance of power. New tensions are arising with the intensified political, economic and military presence of the United States in the region; and three other “power poles”, China, Japan and Russia, also are active in this region.

Changing geopolitical dynamics among the four major powers could stifle the aspirations and hopes of the Korean people for peace and reunification. Increasing arms build-ups in several Asian countries make this one of the fastest-growing regions for military spending in the world, including nuclear arms and high-tech weapons of mass destruction.

The peace we envision is a condition of justice embracing the whole of life and restoring harmony among neighbours. We are convinced that it is the right time to begin a new process towards a comprehensive peace treaty that will replace the 1953 Armistice Agreement and secure just and peaceful relations among nations in the region while normalizing relations between North and South, and facilitating Korean reunification.

As delegates representing 345 churches and some 560 million Christians around the world, we are prepared to renew our support for peace and reconciliation, and to encourage and assist the national and international leaders whose efforts are indispensable.

## **Our Faith Commitment to Peace with Justice**

As a global body of believers in Jesus Christ, we confess our sins in having given in to the powers and principalities of the world in their wars and military conflicts full of hate and enmity, armed with nuclear arsenals and weapons of mass destruction targeting humanity and the whole of God's creation. Also we lament our failure to adequately acknowledge the Korean people's long suffering, caused by external powers fighting for colonial expansion and military hegemony.

We hereby join the Christians in Korea in their confession of faith in Jesus Christ, who came to this world as our Peace (Ephesians 2:13-19); who suffered, died upon the Cross, was buried, and rose again to reconcile humanity to God, to overcome divisions and conflicts, and to liberate all people and make them one (Acts 10:36-40); who, as our Messiah, will bring about a new Heaven and new Earth (Rev.21-22).

With this confession, we join in firm commitment with the Christians of Korea, both North and South, especially in Korean churches' faithful actions to work towards peace, healing, reconciliation and reunification of their people and their land.

### **Faith and Hope in Action**

Ever since its First Assembly in 1948 and the Korean conflict that followed, the WCC has felt the pain of Korea's division and to some degree has found it reflected in tensions among members and partners. We are well aware of the challenges and obstacles on the pathways to peace. We recognize the painstaking effort of Christians in Korea, both North and South, and recall the continued and sustained efforts of the WCC and its ecumenical partners in accompanying the people of the Korean peninsula.

In the midst of an extremely difficult situation, the Korean churches' ecumenical witnesses and prayers have been pivotal. Such faith in action led them to new horizons of hope with prayers. The Tozanso consultation, organized by the WCC Commission of the Churches on International Affairs (CCIA) in 1984, was held at a time when it was difficult for the Korean churches to openly discuss the issue of Korean reunification. The Tozanso consultation was the first attempt by the WCC to bring Christians from a wide spectrum of member churches worldwide together with Christians from Korea, to look at some of the issues raised by the division of the Korean peninsula. The WCC initiative helped to address the issues of the division of Korea and Korean reunification as means to strengthen the Korean people's struggle for peace with justice.

In 1988 the decisive Declaration of Korean Churches for National Unification of the Korean People and Peace in the Korean Peninsula set 1995 as the Year of National Jubilee for the churches in North and South, and affirmed the five principles of: 1) self-reliant unification, 2) peaceful unification, 3) national unity through trust and cooperation, 4) democratic unification by people's participation, and 5) North-South relations based on a humanitarian approach.

We recognize the value of ecumenical engagement in advocacy initiated by the WCC addressing peace and reconciliation as well as denuclearization of the Korean peninsula. Those initiatives provide avenues for North and South Korean church leaders as well as church and ecumenical partners from Asia, North America and Europe to come together within the setting of a common platform. The Ecumenical Forum on Peace, Reconciliation and Reunification of the Korean Peninsula, coordinated and facilitated by the WCC/CCIA with the participation of churches in Asia, Europe and North America in addition the churches in South Korea and the Korean Christian Federation in North Korea has provided additional and frequent opportunities for mutual dialogue and interactions on peace and reunification. Although progress has been made at various levels, there is still a long way to go to accomplish the mission of peace and reunification on the Korean peninsula.

We recall that major WCC events in the past have been venues for historic meetings of church leaders of North and South, starting with the Moscow central committee meeting in 1989 and including WCC assemblies in Canberra (1991), Harare (1998) and Porto Alegre (2006). Various other international consultations held subsequently with the participation of churches from North and South Korea lent further authenticity to ecumenical advocacy on peace and reunification of the Korean peninsula. The international consultation organized by the CCIA in conjunction with the 25th anniversary of the Tozanso process in October 2009 helped to provide new impetus for working towards the goal of witnessing for peace, justice and unity, and it encouraged dialogue and participation for all who have been affected by the tragedy of division. In addition, visits to North Korea by the WCC general secretaries in 1999, 2009 and 2013 have lent credence to the commitment of the WCC and its member churches in supporting the churches in North and South Korea seeking peace and reunification.

We are conscious of the fact that the prevailing geo-political context of the Korean peninsula warrants that the ecumenical movement develop new ways of accompaniment and engagement. As the WCC has been accompanying the churches and people in the Korean peninsula in their struggle to achieve peace with justice and reconciliation, and reunification of the divided Korean peninsula, it is imperative that every effort continue to be taken in providing common platforms for both North and South Korean churches to meet together, with a particular focus on younger generations.

We also discern signs of hope and a framework that would enable the Korean peninsula to embrace peace with justice and fullness of life. On the Korean peninsula, shared human security and human rights must become a greater priority than divisive, competitive and militarized national security. The threat of nuclear weapons has long been recognized, and now serious questions are raised concerning all nuclear energy. With many in the world, the churches share the conviction that a world without nuclear weapons is both necessary and possible. Our shared hope for a nuclear-free world would not only be for the people of the Korean peninsula but for all people in the world, renouncing nuclear weapons and working together for their complete dismantling, leading other regions and showing the way. Hope and possibilities such as these motivate the churches to make greater efforts to work for peace and reconciliation on the Korean peninsula in response to God's promise to lead us towards justice and peace as hallmarks of God's reign. "For he is our peace; in his flesh he has made both groups into one and has broken down the dividing wall, that is, the hostility between us." (Eph. 2:14)

## **The Way towards Healing, Reconciliation and Peace**

During the sixty long years since combat ceased in the Korean War, through the Armistice Agreement of July 27, 1953, the two Koreas, the USA and China have nevertheless continued in a technical state of war with defensive military build-ups including the stockpiling of nuclear weapons. The current situation proves the urgent need for a peace treaty to replace the 1953 Armistice Agreement.

Fresh and decisive action is required to enact a peace treaty. A process towards a peace treaty is crucial for the Korean peninsula and in the entire North East Asia region, as well as contributing to the process of building a nuclear weapon-free peace zone in this region. The peace treaty must be discussed and agreed by the parties to the Armistice Agreement and the countries related to the Armistice Agreement. We believe that a declaration of the end of the Korean War shared by stakeholders will accelerate the agreement's conclusion and contribute to mutual trust and confidence-building among them. Participants in the Six-Party Talks (SPT) previously promised to hold peace forums in order to convert the prevailing armistice system into a concrete peace system. We strongly urge South and North Korea, the USA and China to ensure the keeping of this promise.

At the same time, the USA and Japan should stop imposing blockades and sanctions against the North, while China should act in its facilitator's role in order to resume dialogues, including the Six-Party Talks.

Taking into consideration the continuing humanitarian crisis in the North, we urge the international community to initiate humanitarian support to the people while cooperating with the North in projects for its sustainable development. It has become clear that economic sanctions serve primarily as instruments for punishing the people of a country, especially the poor in any society. Therefore, we question the ethical principles as well as the strategic effectiveness of economic sanctions imposed on North Korea. It is in this context that we raise concern about the UN Security Council Resolutions against North Korea. Opportunities for economic exchanges between the North and other countries in the world must be resumed. This will open new avenues for effective economic collaboration. Above all, this will facilitate active engagement through dialogue to normalize relations. The UN should also initiate efforts for peace-building across the Korean peninsula and lift the existing economic and financial sanctions.

### **The way forward - Recommendations**

We believe that peace-building in a globalized and interdependent world is a shared responsibility of sovereign states, the United Nations and civil society groups including the churches. Affirming the Christian calling to be peacemakers and responding to the faith witness of the Korean churches, which have proclaimed the Jubilee among the Korean people, the member churches of the WCC, gathered in Busan, Republic of Korea for the WCC 10th Assembly from 30 October to 8 November 2013, together affirm the following:

1. Realizing that as we pray with and for the peoples of Korea the churches and ecumenical partners have a specific responsibility toward working together for peace and reconciliation in the Korean peninsula with renewed energy, in close partnership and transparent relationships with each other and with the churches and Christians in both North and South of Korea, the National Council of Churches in Korea and the Korean Christian Federation. We, therefore, commit ourselves to:
  - a) *Embody* the spirit of the Tozanso process including courage, caring, communication, confession, conciliation and commitment;
  - b) *Pray* with the peoples and churches of Korea by designating the Sunday before 15 August as the "Sunday of Prayer for the Peaceful Reunification of the Korean Peninsula";
  - c) *Provide* a wide ecumenical platform for young generations both in North and South Korea to meet together in order to envision a desirable future of the Korean Peninsula;
  - d) *Organize* solidarity visits to churches in North and South Korea that can serve as peacemakers and bridge builders. A first visit can be organized as early as 2014, commemorating the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the historic Tozanso International Consultation; and
  - e) *Continue* accompanying the churches of Korea by providing common platforms for churches and Christians from both North and South to meet together in order to advance towards reconciliation and peace. We recognize that a historically symbolic moment for such initiatives could be found in 2015, the 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the liberation of Korea.
2. Furthermore, we commit ourselves to take actions to:
  - a) *Work* with our governments to mandate the United Nations Security Council to initiate new efforts for peace-building across the Korean Peninsula and to lift the existing economic and financial sanctions imposed on the Democratic People's Republic of Korea;
  - b) *Embark* upon a universal campaign for a Peace Treaty to replace the Armistice Agreement of 1953,

- bringing an end to the state of war;
- c) *Call* upon all foreign powers in the region to participate in a creative process for building peace on the Korean peninsula by halting all military exercises on the Korean peninsula, by ceasing their interventions and reducing military expenditures;
  - d) *Ensure* the complete, verifiable and irreversible elimination of all nuclear weapons and power plants in -North East Asia, by taking steps to establish a Nuclear-Free World and simultaneously joining the emerging international consensus for a humanitarian ban on nuclear weapons in all regions of the world, so that life is no longer threatened by nuclear dangers anywhere on earth;
  - e) *Urge* the governments in both North and South Korea to restore human community with justice and human dignity by overcoming injustice and confrontation, and to heal human community by urgently addressing the humanitarian issue of separated families, by establishing a sustainable process allowing confirmation of the whereabouts of family members and free exchanges of letters and visits, and by offering the support of international agencies where necessary; and
  - f) *Work* with the governments of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea and Republic of Korea in providing international cooperation to maintain a truly Demilitarized Zone (DMZ) and transform it into a zone of peace.

# Statement on the Current Critical Situation of Abyei in South Sudan

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Following a twenty-year-old civil war between the North and South of Sudan, since July 2011, Sudan and the newly formed South Sudan have undergone a difficult separation. However, disputes concerning the border demarcation and affiliation of the oil-rich area of Abyei have threatened to drag both states back to war.

The Abyei Area is an oil-rich region crisscrossing the borders of Sudan and South Sudan and is seen as a historical bridge between the two countries. This area of Sudan, about the size of Jamaica, is traditionally a territory of the Ngok Dinka chiefdoms, which the British transferred in 1905 from Bahr-al-Ghazal Province in southern Sudan to Kordofan Province in the North. Initially the struggle associated with this region was about land and pasture claimed by both the Ngok Dinka and the Misseriya communities. With the onset of the First Sudanese Civil War (1956–1972), these two communities took separate paths, with the Misseriya and the Ngok Dinka supporting the North and the southern Anyanya rebels, respectively. Most recently this local dispute exacerbated a wider political conflict between two warring groups which subsequently became Sudan and South Sudan. At the national level, however, the struggle has been about natural resources and the area's strategic location in times of war. Since independence, Sudan has been redrawing its borders to gain access to natural resources and to deprive the South of revenue. The discovery of commercial quantities of oil in Abyei has raised the stakes for control and exploitation.

Several attempts have been undertaken to resolve the Abyei conflicts. The World Council of Churches (WCC) and the All Africa Conference of Churches (AACC) brokered the Addis Ababa Peace Agreement of 1972, which ended the first Sudanese civil war and included a clause that provided for a referendum allowing Abyei to choose to remain in the North or join the autonomous South. This referendum was never held, leading to tensions and incidents of violence and the establishment of a Dinka unit in the Anyanya II rebellion of 1975. The 1995 Asmara Talks agreed to Abyei's determining whether to join the South or stay in Kordofan. In 2004, Abyei was accorded "special administrative status" by the Protocol on the Resolution of the Abyei Conflict (Abyei Protocol) in the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) that ended the Second Sudanese Civil War. In 2005, boundaries were established by the Abyei Borders Commission in yet another attempt to resolve the longstanding dispute. Disputes and violence that followed establishment of these boundaries led to a boundary revision by the Permanent Court of Arbitration (PCA) in The Hague in 2009. This revision has since been endorsed by all parties to the dispute. As was the case in the 1972 Agreement, the CPA provided for a referendum that would allow Abyei to choose to remain in the North or join the autonomous South Sudan, a means of permanently resolving the dispute. Considering that the referendum has never been held, the sentiment of the people of this area that they have been let down seems justified.

The difficulties in holding the Abyei referendum have resulted particularly from the failure to implement fully the 2005 CPA, even though the accord was explicit about the time frame and the process of the referendum. Indeed, the Ngok Dinka of Abyei felt much more alienated when South Sudan, alongside whom they had fought against the North, declared independence from Sudan in 2011. Frustrated and tired of waiting, the Ngok Dinka organized and registered voters for their own referendum, held 27 to 29 October 2013. The results showed that 99.9 percent of the voters want to be part of South Sudan. The challenge, however, is that the unilateral Ngok Dinka poll has no legal weight, especially because both Sudan and South Sudan have said they will not recognize the results. This also means the international community will not recognize the results.

The Ngok Dinka community has been compelled to countenance a unilateral referendum because all other options have been closed to them. The Abyei city has been destroyed three times in as many decades. The latest destruction took place on 21 May 2012, when Sudan Armed Forces (SAF) seized Abyei city and the National Congress Party of Sudan (NCP) dissolved the Abyei Administration. The conflict that erupted in the following days and weeks led to the killing of more than thirty civilians and displacement of more than 60,000. In June the UN established the Interim Security Force for Abyei (ISFA), composed of 1,400 Ethiopian troops. The assassination of the Paramount Chief of the Ngok Dinka in June 2013 was carried out in spite of the presence of the UN peace-keeping force. This convinced the Ngok Dinka that protection by the international community is not guaranteed. As a result, they decided on the unilateral referendum as a last resort.

The Abyei issue, more than any other unresolved conflict, constitutes the most likely source of violence between the Dinka and the Misseriya. Such violence would not be limited to those two communities; it may involve the two sovereign states, South Sudan and Sudan in a war between two nations. Should that happen, then all the democratic, political, and economic gains following the independence of South Sudan would be rolled back, with all the adverse implications for regional security.

**The 10th Assembly of the World Council of Churches meeting in Busan, Republic of Korea, from 30 October to 8 November 2013, therefore:**

- A. **Welcomes** the African Union (AU) statement of 21 October 2013, which expresses the AU's disquiet about Sudan's delay in implementing negotiated agreements and calls on the two countries to resume their discussion on the final status of Abyei;
- B. **Encourages** the AU to expedite the planned visit of its Peace and Security Council to Abyei to finalize the arrangements for the referendum;
- C. **Urges** the governments of South Sudan and Sudan, who are tasked with the responsibility of ensuring the decision to have the CPA-agreed referendum for Abyei, to ensure that such is implemented without further delay;
- D. *Commends* South Sudan for acceding to all the provisions in the AU-sponsored Agreement on the Abyei referendum. But without a corresponding assent by Sudan, the implementation is severely hampered; therefore we call on Sudan to accede to the said Agreement, so that the CPA-agreed Abyei referendum may be carried expeditiously;
- E. **Urges** the International Community, particularly the guarantors of the CPA, to re-engage the issue of Abyei as a matter of moral conscience in ensuring justice for the people of Abyei;
- F. **Urges** the United Nations, the African Union and the Troika (Norway, UK and US) to do what is right for the people of Abyei: to urge the Government of Sudan to implement the process for the referendum; and
- G. Recommends the churches and the international ecumenical community to re-engage the process for Abyei referendum and to give it the necessary moral and material support.

# Statement affirming the Christian presence and witness in the Middle East

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*Jesus said, "Do not be afraid, little flock, for it gives your Father great happiness to give you the kingdom."  
(Luke 12:32)*

*"Take heart, it is I. Do not be afraid."*

## 1. Christians still keep hope

The profound political changes that have swept the Middle East and North Africa, since early 2011 following popular uprisings, have carried with them hopes for political systems based on human rights and the rule of law. The seeds of an irreversible transformation have been sown. However, in several countries the efforts towards political transformation have been rejected, which has undermined the demands for peaceful reform. Quite rapidly, large areas of the Middle East and North Africa have succumbed to violent sectarian, ethnic, and tribal animosities, and the reform movement has been distracted by political radicalism and religious intolerance. This has led to a widespread humanitarian catastrophe. In this critical situation, the worldwide Christian community is enjoined to manifest its solidarity with all peoples in the Middle East who are struggling for just and peaceful societies, and, at the same time, affirms that the continued presence of Christians in this region is indispensable for plural and diverse communities, and commits itself to accompany all in the building of democratic civil societies.

1.1. The circumstances throughout the Middle East present the churches with a new *kairos* moment as in the "*Kairos* Palestine: A Moment of Truth" document of 2009, when Palestinian Christians joined in a common reading of the situation, and challenged the churches to prophetic action.

1.1.1. In May 2013, in Lebanon, the World Council of Churches (WCC) and the Middle East Council of Churches (MECC) convened an ecumenical gathering of Christian leaders and representatives from churches and organizations in the region and from 34 other countries, to explore ways to strengthen the Christian presence and witness. They observed that: "*This is a time of crisis with special intensity here in the Middle East, but affects all of humankind. The elements of this crisis include an intensification of religious tribalism, increasing fundamentalism in many of the world's religions, dispersion of the influence of radicalized Islamist groups, widespread violence and insecurity, a deficit in democratic legitimacy and credibility, poverty and lack of opportunity, especially for women and youth, Christian emigration from the region, and a generalized sense of abandonment following decades of unhelpful intervention. Christians, Muslims and Jews all experience the destructive effects of these trends.*"

## 2. Vibrant Christian churches

Christians are rooted in the soil of the Middle East. From the manger of Bethlehem of Judea, the refuge of Egypt, the waters of the Jordan River and Sea of Galilee, and the road to the Cross in Jerusalem itself, Christians are as rooted in the soil of the Middle East as are olive trees in the Garden of Gethsemane and cedars in Lebanon. It was on the road to Damascus that Paul was converted (Acts 9) and in Antioch that the disciples first were called Christians (Acts 11:26).

2.1 Despite the ups and downs of harsh and testing historical, as well as present circumstances, Christians have continued and will continue to live together with those with whom this soil is shared.

The Christians living in this region are an essential part of their lands, contributing to the rich traditions, plural societies and cultural diversity. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Christians in the region struggled to change their status to one where they would be equal with all other citizens in their societies. Christians today are aware that the guarantee of their free, engaged and meaningful existence in these societies is not by protection, nor a bequest given by political powers, but is acquired by forthright participation as citizens, and by persistent patience in encouraging mentalities and structures that enhance the free participation of all. Today, they do not see themselves as minorities. Rather, they view themselves as equal citizens contributing to the well-being of their nations. Their mission and witness in society is evident in multiple spheres of public life such as in culture, politics, education, health services, women and youth development, child protection, social services, relief and development. Numerical proportion historically has not limited the contribution and role of Christians in the Middle East.

2.2. Christians in the region have contributed to the idea that plurality is a gift of God, and that respect for diversity in plural societies is an affirmation that all peoples are created equal in the eyes of God.

2.2.1. In addition to the diversity of religions, diversity also exists within the rich and varied traditions among Christian churches in the Middle East. This has prompted forms of ecumenism that are particular to the region. Eastern Orthodox, Oriental Orthodox, Roman Catholic, Protestant and Anglican churches, have together participate in the MECC as an instrument for joint witness and *diakonia*. But ecumenism in the region goes beyond this institutional context to reach the everyday lives of Christians.

2.3. Christian spirituality and witness are revealed by the vibrant monastic communities and parishes, theological faculties, hospitals, schools and humanitarian services. These are essential parts of the creative and continuous witness of the Christians and the churches, offering spiritual resources to all people in the region.

### **3. Christians in the regional turmoil are called to work for justice and peace**

Yet, despite the centuries-long reality of plural communities in the Middle East, some have exploited the current turmoil to advance political radicalism and religious intolerance. Hundreds of thousands of people in the region have been killed, maimed, imprisoned and displaced. The numbers of suffering, internally displaced people, and refugees into neighbouring countries of the Middle East and beyond have created a crushing humanitarian catastrophe.

3.1 In Syria, violence and turmoil have ravaged the lives of millions of people. Abductions of civilians, including clergy, and torture, massacres and extrajudicial killings have become a daily reality. Entire communities, families and individuals, have been forced to flee their homes, to find refuge in other areas of their country, in neighbouring countries and in distant places. Humanitarian relief is unable to meet the desperate needs of dislocated people. The movement of refugees from Syria to neighbouring countries has stressed those in flight and those offering hospitality. The political turmoil within Syria threatens the unity and stability of Syria and its neighbours. This massive movement of population carries serious implications for those who remain and hope for reconciled communities once peace and stability are restored.

3.2. In Egypt, political turmoil has provided a pretext to instrumentalise and politicise religion, where again, the Christian population and places of worship have been particularly targeted. The level of violence and tensions has increased considerably and reached an alarming level. It is hoped that the young generation which struggled for freedom, human dignity and equal rights to prevail in Egypt,

will continue this long struggle and most importantly, will continue this struggle in an inclusive way with all those who hold these values.

3.3. In Iraq, even after the withdrawal of foreign occupying forces, people are still not enjoying human security and dignity. Acts of violence all over the country have reached alarming levels and are affecting the entire population, including the already vulnerable Christian community. Genuine democracy, equal citizenship, the rule of law, reconciliation and impartial development are still out of reach. Under such conditions, Iraq is at great risk of being emptied of its human resources. It is hoped that Iraqis will work together, healing wounds and building a better future for themselves. It is also essential that dialogue between Christians and Muslims continues in order to promote justice and peace in the country.

3.4. Christians in Iran have been living in the country for centuries, contributing to its rich culture and civilisation. They constitute an integral part of the society and, along with the rest of Iranians, are suffering from the international sanctions that have a harmful impact on them much more than on the government. Lifting the sanctions will encourage the present government to persevere with the undertaken reforms and to abide by its international obligations under the terms of the nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty.

3.5. This tension and violence around the Middle East and in North Africa is taking place in the midst of the on-going and longstanding Palestine/Israel conflict in the region, and the Israeli occupation of Palestinian and Arab territories since 1967. This remains a central issue and a major source of concern for all who are working for peace with justice and for reconciliation. It also remains the core problem that is fuelling the logic underlying many of the conflicts in the region, putting at risk international relations and peace. Resolving once and for all the conflict between the Israelis and Palestinians in accordance with United Nations resolutions and international law, addressing all final status issues, including the right of return, can only help in resolving the other conflicts in the region.

3.6. In Jerusalem today Palestinians, Christians and Muslims alike, face discriminatory Israeli policies. "Jerusalem is the foundation of our vision and our entire life. She is the city to which God gave a particular importance in the history of humanity" (*Kairos* Palestine document). Jews, Christians and Muslims alike look to Jerusalem as a place God blessed with the significance of His presence. As a city of two nations revered by the faithful of three religions, it needs to be the place that models for the world the possibilities of living together peacefully in mutual respect.

#### **4. The Gospel imperative for costly ecumenical solidarity**

Christians reject on principle governance that diminishes and disenfranchises the people's right to express opinion or to fully participate in the formulation of public policy. The popular uprisings and subsequent unrest across the region, however chaotic and dangerous, nonetheless reflect the urgency and capacity of people to claim their right to good governance and protection under the law. These historic events demonstrate the public's repudiation of insecurity in the region, including the manipulation of religious teachings, economic inequalities, failing political alliances, and the imbalances of power that threaten all the people of the region, and humankind. Despite the current turmoil in the region, the long commitment of the Church must remain steadfast to sow seeds of peace and justice and build on the progress that is being made.

4.1. The WCC has consistently expressed its deep concern for all peoples in this region where the history of our faith was born and grew. More particularly, the Christian presence and witness in the land of the Bible has been of vital significance for the ecumenical family, from its inception up until

the present day. The central committee, meeting in Geneva in February 2011, grounded theologically the importance of this presence by stating that *“the WCC has viewed the Middle East as a region of special interest, being the birthplace of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam... Our living faith has its roots in this land, and is nourished and nurtured by the unbroken witness of the local churches who have their own roots from the apostolic times. Without this Christian presence, the conviviality among peoples from different faiths, cultures, civilisations, which is a sign of God’s love for all humanity, will be endangered. In addition, its extinction will be a sign of failure of the ecumenical family to express the Gospel imperative for costly solidarity”*. It also expressed the Council’s principles that guide its policy concerning the Middle East region: *“God’s justice and love for all of creation, the fundamental rights of all people, respect for human dignity, solidarity with the needy, and dialogue with people of other faiths”*. It finally noted that *“political developments in the region point to signs of hope for democratic changes, respect for human rights and the rule of law in several countries”*. In this context the WCC reaffirms the principle expressed by the central committee in 2011 that *“peace and reconciliation must be conditioned by justice”*. The future of the churches and the Christians in these countries is and must be a concern for the entire ecumenical family.

**The 10th Assembly of the WCC, meeting in Busan, Republic of Korea from 30 October to 8 November 2013, therefore:**

A. **Reaffirms** that Christians in the Middle East hold in a unique, tangible way the legacy of the apostolic era, preserving in the footsteps of our Lord the living Church. Support of these Christian communities, spiritually and materially, preserves the continuity of the Christian presence for the benefit of all Christians and all people from the region and worldwide;

B. **Regards** current events in various countries in the Middle East as an irreversible process leading to changes in systems of governance, and hopes for a future of justice, peace and stability, cultural diversity and plural communities;

C. **Prays** that Christians, especially in the region, maintain their hope even in these extremely critical situations and that these events will be an opportunity for positive change in these societies and for participatory democracy;

D. **Encourages** all peoples in the region, including Christians, to initiate actions questioning the abuse of authority and rejecting corruption, as they continue to support one another in the common effort to build democratic civil societies, based on the rule of law, social justice, and respect for human rights, including religious freedom and freedom of conscience;

E. **Supports** Christians in the region in their commitment to engage in constructive dialogue with other religious and ethnic communities so that their countries’ manifold heritage is protected and secured;

F. **Recommends** that the WCC reinforces programmes that enhance regional and international advocacy in partnership with Christians in the Middle East and North Africa;

G. **Calls** upon the WCC member churches to express costly solidarity with Christians and churches in the region as well as with all peoples who are struggling for justice and peace, through:

- a. **Supporting** efforts to reinvigorate the MECC, in order to enable it to continue being the voice of Middle East Christians to the world, and the trusted source of basic objective information;
- b. **Accompanying** Christians in the Middle East as they elaborate a common vision for the region;
- c. **Facilitating** responsible pilgrimage to the region.;

- d. **Organising** solidarity visits in consultation with churches in the region, remaining in active fellowship with them;
- e. **Disseminating** educational materials that accurately reflect the geography and history of the Middle East and the realities of sister churches located there;
- f. **Developing** exchange programmes to facilitate the sharing of experiences, information on interfaith relations and dialogue among the churches and religions; and
- g. **Supporting** local churches in empowering women, young people and children to use and develop their capacities and providing opportunities for their meaningful participation in the churches and society;

H. **Urges** church-related agencies and all ecumenical partners to strengthen their efforts to address the humanitarian needs in Syria and in all neighbouring countries, focusing humanitarian efforts upon (1) assisting Syrians to remain in their home communities, (2) easing the burden of internally displaced persons and the communities hosting them, (3) easing the burden of host families and communities in neighbouring countries (4) assisting refugees with the goal and intention to facilitate their resettlement into their own communities and homes in Syria, and **insists** that all governments allow for full humanitarian access, seeking peaceful ways to exert pressure to stop actions of violence;

I. **Urges** the United Nations, and the international community, especially countries that are in positions of political power, to create policies that promote and reach comprehensive peace with justice for all peoples of the region, and to expand every effort to support cessation of violence and military activities;

J. **Reiterates** its call to the United Nations to secure and protect the integrity of the holy sites of all religions in Jerusalem and make them accessible to all as well as to end the occupation of East Jerusalem by Israel;

K. **Demands** the immediate release of the two Archbishops from Aleppo, His Eminence Boulos (Yazigi) Greek Orthodox Metropolitan of Aleppo and Alexandretta and His Eminence Mor Youhanna Gregorios (Ibrahim) Syriac Orthodox Metropolitan of Aleppo in Syria, kidnapped on 22 April 2013 as they were on a humanitarian mission to negotiate the release of two kidnapped priests from Aleppo, as well as Father Paolo Dall'Oglio, kidnapped on 29 July 2013, and all captives and those unjustly imprisoned.

*Great God,*

*Hear us as we cry out to you for peace and justice for the peoples and the land itself.*

*Grant us homelands where water, land and resources are respected and shared by all.*

*Help us share your love with our neighbours and plant the seeds of tolerance in our communities.*

*Comfort us so that our souls are healed from the wounds of wars and conflicts.*

*Give us your light that we may walk out of the shadows of death and impunity.*

*May your justice truly course through our lands like an unstoppable torrent.*

*Teach us to trust in hope that one day soon all may dwell beneath their vines and fig trees in peace and happiness.*

*Opening Prayer, WCC 10th Assembly, 30 October 2013*