



For action

**REPORT OF THE GENERAL SECRETARY
Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace – A Journey of Hope**

1. The work of the WCC since we met in June has taken the Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace (PJP) to another level of understanding both conceptually and practically. We discussed extensively in Armenia in June, how we should coordinate the advice coming from the Reference Group of PJP with the executive committee's own initiatives, experiences and decisions for the plans of the WCC. I appreciate the participation in this meeting of the moderators and representatives of the commissions and consultative bodies. Their participation helps to ensure that the Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace is the unifying motif for all our programmatic work. They will report from their various consultative bodies on the progress of this coordination. I will report here on how the Pilgrimage has been taken into new landscapes, inviting more active partners and companions on our way, particularly through the agenda I have had as general secretary. As you well know, there is much more happening in the work of the Council which is now increasingly shared through our website. For example, a high level delegation participated in the 70th anniversary commemoration of the nuclear devastation of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, Japan in August 1945.

Pilgrimage with our churches in Latin America

2. "If any in our constituency will not adopt the terminology of 'pilgrimage', you will find them on the visit to member churches in Latin-America." So I heard before the two weeks of intensive programme visiting this significant region in our constituency. With a very strong Catholic presence in the countries in Latin-America, Protestant churches there often use other religious terminology and practice rather than "pilgrimage". These churches hosted the 9th Assembly in Brazil 2006, helping us focus on transformation, which is indeed echoed in the theme of our Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace. The experience of visiting Argentina, Chile, Brazil and Colombia was inspiring, even somewhat surprising as to how meaningful the PJP seems to be to renew the way these member churches work with and in the WCC. President Gloria Nohemy Ulloa Alvarado accompanied me; and, together we shared, discussed and preached in all these contexts the invitation to be part of this new wave of the ecumenical movement today, as an opportunity to find their new role in the WCC as member churches and as people working for justice and peace in this continent, in the spirit and search for Christian unity.

3. The first event was in Buenos Aires, led by the now late bishop of the Evangelical Methodist Church of Argentina and former president and central committee member of the WCC, Aldo Etchegoyen, and with contributions from the Nobel Peace Laureate Adolfo Pérez Esquivel and others. We emphasized the connection to the struggle for Human Rights

leading to democracy and peace as an earlier phase of this pilgrimage and that we now need to be together in new ways defining the movement in faith we are called to make for the next years.

4. In Chile, I preached in the Pentecostal Cathedral in Curicó with a great celebration of their commitment to ecumenical relations, ecumenical formation and the work for social justice. The meeting with President Michelle Bachelet was a very meaningful conversation about gender justice and climate change.

5. In Colombia, there were significant gatherings of worship and discussion. On one day, there was a meeting with the minister of interior and the leaders of all protestant and orthodox churches of the country to discuss for the first time their relationship to the state. The final meeting with President Santos was very significant, with him expressing how important the WCC, CLAI and the churches in Colombia are and will be for the process of building peace after an agreement is signed. We were asked to contribute to workshops for peace-building and will do so in the next months.

6. Dr Walter Altmann, the former moderator of the WCC central committee, participated in the programme in Brazil, which also included a lengthy meeting with the heads of all four member churches about the WCC and the PJP as a way forward together for the ecumenical movement in Brazil. We also had a substantial meeting with the minister for human rights. The WCC was again recognized for its work related to Human Rights in the past (*Brasil: Nunca Mais*) and was welcomed as a partner in raising current concern about increased violence by fundamentalist Christians against Afro-Brazilian groups in the country. We also discussed urgent challenges for Indigenous People, the longstanding work to overcome poverty, food security, climate change and other issues of high significance for Brazil.

Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace as a common platform for member churches, ecumenical partners and cooperation with partners of “good will”

7. The words and initiatives of the first Latin American pope, Francis, were also echoed in many of our conversations, particularly the significant encyclical *‘Laudato si’* on the care for our environment, our common home. It was a new development in ecumenical partnership that the Roman Catholic Church, through a letter from the Pope to the presidents of the PCPCU and PCJP, asked for the marking of the Day of Creation on 1 September together with the member churches of the WCC. We did so in the national cathedral in Brasilia. I also have participated in other events leading towards the COP 21 in Paris. The mobilization in many churches around the world is promising. Both in Trondheim, Norway in July and in Westphalia, Germany in October, I addressed climate pilgrimage events. These events are significant in the peoples’ mobilization to apply political pressure on the participants in Paris at this historical moment for humankind and the future of our common life as creation. It is the development of a new common ecumenical platform, emphasizing together the urgency of addressing issues of justice and peace as expressions of our common faith in the triune God.

8. The 50th anniversary of the Joint Working Group between the WCC and the PCPCU was celebrated in June in Rome, as the introduction to the work of the newly appointed group. In a solemn moment of recognizing and giving thanks to God for the enormous work and the substantial changes in ecumenical relations that has happened since the end of the 2nd

Vatican council, we listened carefully to the perspectives of present and former moderators of the group as well as the words of a letter to the WCC general secretary from Pope Francis. He emphasized again what he said in his mission statement, that “realities are more important than ideas”, encouraging strong common efforts to make a difference together as expressions of the unity to which God in Christ has called us. The words of greetings from the President of PCPCU, Cardinal Koch, as well as from former moderators (such as Bishop em Jonas Jonsson) and myself emphasized the new opportunities of the present ecumenical openness towards a common Christian pilgrimage and witness.

9. It has been an honor to continue in the year-long commemoration of the centennial of the Armenian Genocide. In a ceremony in Bikfaya, Lebanon, the Armenian Church of the Holy Muron was blessed, symbolically anointing the 1.5 million martyrs of the Armenian Genocide. The ceremony was led by Catholicos Aram I of the Holy See of Cilicia, along with other church leaders. I shared in my address during the ceremony that the memory of the victims moves us to take pro-active measures to stop all attacks against humanity.

10. In a celebration of 75 years of the Taizé community and 100 years since the birth of Brother Roger, we could sense some of the same gratefulness for the ecumenical journey we have had together and how the pilgrimage approach is a proper framework to express our shared spirituality and commitment to work for unity, peace and justice in the world. Over the decades, this community serves as a constant call and accompaniment of young people and others to become pilgrims in spirit and in service for the Church and the world. I was honoured that *L'Osservatore Romano* printed my reflections on how the Taizé community in a profound way expresses the idea of the Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace and the words of greetings from the WCC at this occasion.

11. This year's meeting of the secretaries of the Christian World Communions was hosted in London by the Salvation Army and the Society of Friends. The meeting is always an important forum of exchange and update on what is happening in our sister organizations. They seem to share the vision of the Pilgrimage with us; but, they also naturally ask how the WCC sees them contributing to the PJP as a common ecumenical journey. In my reporting about major developments in the WCC, I also shared some reflections in this respect. First of all, I see the PJP both as a programmatic profile of the WCC and an approach for strengthening the integrity of the one ecumenical movement and the interrelatedness of the many dimensions of our work for unity, mission, dialogue between religions, and work for justice and peace in different regions. Secondly, I see the great challenges we are addressing through the pilgrimage such as climate change, economic justice, peace and justice in the Middle East, care for refugees, religion and violence, to name a few, as our common tasks in the ecumenical movement. I asked them to see their contributions as part of the one common Pilgrimage. In that sense, the Pilgrimage is a description of the ecumenical movement in our time. Thirdly, I particularly addressed the need for a stronger focus on our unity as solidarity and unity of life (re the Unity statement from the 10th Assembly). We need to care for the One Body of Christ, a unity that is grounded in the Triune God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, the God of life - the creator, saviour and life-giver. The work with the Christian World Communions is a natural partnership for the WCC; and, I see our presence there as a privileged opportunity.

12. The Meeting of the Permanent Committee on Consensus and Collaboration (PCCC) was hosted by the two member churches of the WCC in Finland, the Orthodox Church of Finland

and the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland. This was another opportunity to reflect together on how the PJP opens for more practical cooperation for common diakonia and witness and how this relates to other dimensions of the unity we search. The report from the meeting is substantial and is tabled at this executive committee meeting. The PCCC is a significant instrument for the WCC to constantly renew and remind us of the basis so carefully established through the special commission and to pursue the proper and trustful conversation on questions raised about membership criteria and how to balance different concerns of the council in elections and appointments.

13. The wider circle of cooperation under the perspective of PJP has been affirmed in many events since we last met; and, this also will be the case in some events following this meeting. The agreement with UNICEF has been developed under careful consideration with the executive committee and the leadership of the central committee. I signed it in confidence that this cooperation has a significant potential for making us more able to work for justice and peace for and with our youngest generations, and to particularly counteract violence against children and their human rights. We also look forward to how we through churches can mobilize children and those who care for their future through new initiatives about climate change. Many of our churches and others are very interested in the implementation of this agreement. The Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Violence against Children, Marta Santos Pais, visited me in my office and was particularly inspired by the Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace as theme for cooperation for children and their rights in our time. I invited her to the rights of children plenary of the central committee meeting in 2016.

14. New ways to work together with our member churches for justice and peace have been searched for in mobilizing cooperation in what has developed from a crisis and war in Syria and Iraq to a refugee crisis in Europe. We have followed up the work with our member churches and partners in Syria and Iraq and were encouraged by the offer from the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) to particularly address the needs of the religious minorities in these countries, to see what can be done to provide them aid, protection in a short and long perspective, and opportunities to remain in their homelands and at least in the area until they can move back. We wait for the final agreement between the MFA, Norwegian Church Aid and the WCC.

15. The critical situation in Syria and Iraq due to the war and the intensive terror of ISIS, as well as the increasing use of military means to try to stop the terror and the war, has raised many questions and led to many discussions where the WCC is asked to contribute. So far I have tried to follow the same line as the WCC has pursued before, in urging every partner, nationally and particularly also internationally, to support a political peace process for Syria and end the suffering of the people of Syria. The UN Security Council finally supported a peace plan for Syria; but, the implementation requires strong political investment and diplomatic work. In 2012, when we had a wide consultation on this issue at Bossey with the UN, the WCC expressed its reservations regarding the idea that a military “solution” would bring an end to the conflict. Peace must be built by ending the use of Syria as a field of conflicting interests, and thereby ending a situation that is offering terrorists a wide space to operate. WCC is seen as a relevant and significant partner to promote this agenda by the UN envoy, Stefan de Mistura, and others like the Swiss government, which is now also providing financial support to our work with the partners in Syria.

16. The Greek government invited me on behalf of the WCC for a wide conference on religious plurality and peaceful coexistence in the Middle East, in Athens in October this year. Several heads of churches, including the Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew I and Patriarch John X of the Greek Orthodox Church of Antioch and All the East, WCC President for Eastern Orthodox Churches, were present, as were leaders of other faith communities, politicians, diplomats and others. The new dimension of this consultation was a stronger recognition of how important religious plurality and the religious communities and leaders were for the peaceful coexistence in the past and still are for the future of the region. The political peace processes must include these dimensions. The Greek initiative to monitor violence, also in the name of religion, could benefit from our experiences to establish a joint Muslim-Christian monitoring centre in Nigeria. That process has been pursued well; and, we look forward to the launch of it in March next year and should monitor both violence and joint peace initiatives.

17. The theme of religion and violence was highlighted in a wide consultation on “Discrimination, Persecution and Martyrdom: Following Christ together” organized by the Global Christian Forum in Tirana, Albania, last week. It was hosted by the Albanian churches, where our former president, Archbishop Dr Anastasios gave a substantial biblical and ecclesiological reflection on the Christian life and witness as a deep expression of the theology of the cross and the resurrection. The statement is provided for the executive committee. Our WCC member of the planning committee, Hielke Wolters, and the WCC participants gave significant contributions to the plenaries, to the discussions and the work toward the outcome of the consultation. In my final panel contribution, I reflected on how this dimension of discrimination and suffering must be a significant perspective of how we as churches show solidarity with one another in our Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace. We are as followers of Christ called to be the light of the world; when there is injustice we should be those who hunger and thirst for righteousness for all. The light of the world is not our light, but the light of God’s love, justice and peace. We need to strengthen even more our work for religious freedom and human rights. This light of the world through us as churches also should help us see better how others are suffering, how we can address the daily problems and root causes, and how we can educate and give enlightenment to the next generations on how to counteract violence and discrimination in the name of religion. We also need to learn from Christ and from one another about how following Christ must be understood in a deeper reflection of the theology of the cross and resurrection, being both prepared for the realities and carrying a life giving hope together. There was a strong atmosphere of sharing, listening to victims, but also discussing the need for repentance of some Christians regarding the problems they have caused other Christian sisters and brothers. This was expressed in a particularly impressive way from representatives of the Pentecostal movement.

18. I see the need for the Global Christian Forum as a forum, a context for our sharing of realities, of reflections and even confessions. However, it is also important that it does not become an organisation for implementation. It does not have the right mandate, capacity nor the competence to do that and particularly not on behalf of all these constituencies participating. The follow up work must be done in the respective organizations and churches. There was a signal to us as WCC of a wish for stronger cooperation from the new leadership of the WEA, the general secretary, Bishop Efraim Tendero.

19. Our preparations for this discussion in the central committee in Trondheim is benefiting from many of these events and initiatives. In the meeting of the executive committee in Cyprus, November 2015, you asked me to pursue a study on religion and violence. In the past year the concern about violence justified in the name of religion and violence against religion has become even more urgent. In my visits to several churches and countries, I have become deeply impressed and saddened by the harsh realities, the violence and suffering, of so many people because of tensions and conflicts between religious and ethnic groups or the oppression by dictatorial regimes. The situation of people who have to leave their village, town, country, because they are afraid of losing their lives is heart-breaking. The number of refugees has increased beyond imagination. They have lost hope for a good future in their own country. They want to give opportunities to their children to build up a life without fear and violence.

20. I have asked the staff to focus on these realities and to develop an ecumenical response, both at the level of understanding the crises as well as the practical level of finding ways to support churches in difficult situations. Colleagues have developed a first draft of a study document on religion and violence. As the realities are complex, I have asked them to consider different aspects, such as the perspective of inter-religious dialogue and cooperation, the ecumenical experience developed through the Decade to Overcome Violence, the international affairs perspective as well as the expertise gained from work with migrant communities. The different ideas and perspectives have been tested in an all staff meeting which took place earlier this week on 11 November. I share the results of our work so far with you in the document tabled for this meeting.

21. Valuing the work done by staff so far, my proposal is to widen the circle of involvement in the next phase. Already in specific study meetings on violence against Christians, Jews and Muslims, experts from different churches and ecumenical organisations have been invited to participate. My feeling is that we need to do that in the coming years in a more systematic and structural way. Therefore, I propose to form a reference group for interreligious dialogue and cooperation like we have reference groups for several aspects of the Council's work. The first task of this reference group will be to work jointly with the leadership of the CCIA on a next draft of a study document on religion and violence. The results of this joint work have to be shared with the executive committee.

22. As we have planned, one of the plenary themes for the central committee meeting in 2016 will be on religion and violence. I hope that the study document we are working on at this point can serve as a background paper for this plenary on religion and violence.

23. The consultations in Athens and Albania followed immediately after a visit to Hungary and Greece to understand the impact of the enormous flow of refugees into Europe and to show solidarity with the refugees and the churches. The Hungary delegation included: Dr Quawas, the general Secretary of Churches' Commission for Migrants in Europe (CCME), Doris Peschke, the WCC director of communication and general secretary. In Hungary, we met with heads of member churches and a deputy minister. A lot of information about civil society supporting the refugees not shared in the media was brought to our attention. The Greece delegation included: HE Metropolitan Gennadios, the WCC director of communication and general secretary. Prof Dr Dimitria Koukoura received us and joined us in Thessaloniki. We met in Greece with the Archbishop of Athens and others in the

leadership of the church, many involved in diaconal work, the UNHCR representative, and the local bishop near the border to Serbia.

24. We discussed the fear that has caused negative attitudes and very restrictive political actions, particularly in Hungary, and how we need to learn also from those reactions in how we work for a plural and peaceful coexistence in Europe. The importance of proper listening, reflections, and discussing how the challenges can be met became quite clear. The ecumenical movement is significant in these challenges. These are challenges not disappearing, and we need to continue working together as churches on our pilgrimage to assist the refugees in all stages of their journey and in addressing the root causes for the situation.

25. As a follow up to these visits, I called together with the Chairperson for EKD and bishop of the Lutheran Church in Bavaria, Dr Heinrich Bedford-Strohm for a church leader consultation in Munich in October. The local church offered great hospitality; the WCC worked on the program. In spite of the short notice, significant participation of church leaders from Europe, the Middle East and Africa was possible. The communiqué is attached to this report. The need for being flexible and taking new initiatives with the churches should be one of the hallmarks of the WCC. We see how much stronger our contribution to justice and peace can be when we work closely with the churches.

The WCC, organization and finance

26. Colleagues have worked very hard to revise the plans for 2016 according to requirements laid out in the financial strategy and the signals from the executive committee in June as well as the funding partners since then; and, we have also made several efforts to establish a balanced budget for 2016. This will all be discussed in relation to the respective documents and in the sub-committees. It was also necessary to reduce staff costs substantially, in addition to not replacing some of the natural departures of 2015 and 2016. This was done after serious reflections in the staff leadership group; and, I presented the whole picture to colleagues at the end of September. Those affected by termination of contracts were given this information in personal conversations with me. I am impressed at the willingness of colleagues to be realistic and supportive relative to this very difficult issue. The support staff is now being reorganized in a programme support staff team lead by Catherine Christ-Taha; and, we see potential for savings and doing our work more effectively, including the wisdom and resources of all colleagues in the process.

27. Among the challenges we are facing these days, let me mention two where the attention of the general secretary has been particularly asked for. EAPPI is a challenging structure and enterprise but very significant for our common witness. I have initiated a management assessment of this programme, particularly looking at how the different stakeholders work together. The report is expected in February 2016. We have made many efforts to clarify the membership of the Church of Jesus Christ on Earth by His Special Envoy Simon Kimbangu in the WCC. I am worried about our possibilities after receiving a letter from the spiritual leader a few days ago. We will be able to discuss both of these matters during the course of this meeting.

28. I am realistically acknowledging that we have less capacities with less resources. We also need to see how we reduce our activities accordingly. On the other hand, it is time to

prioritize even more carefully what we do and how we make the most strategic choices for our work. Both are happening these days; and, it follows also more and very positive expectations and willingness to work with the WCC; one example is the meeting with the Grand Imam of the al-Azhar of Cairo which will follow this executive committee meeting. I am hopeful for the WCC when I look to the next year, as we also have now a chance to make strategic new decisions for the optimal use of our resources. More details about changes in staff responsibilities will be given in separate documents and sessions.

29. As we are here at Bossey, I want to give special recognition to Luc Hegetschweiler and the rest of the staff of the Bossey Guest House. Because of their hard work, the guest house has achieved a favorable financial position for 2015. To these and all my staff colleagues, we give them their well-deserved appreciation. I am proud of my colleagues and their hard work; and I see high quality in all of their work, including those who have to leave the WCC as staff.

30. The development of the building project is shared in an appendix to this report. The future neighbour, the Global Fund, can now see progress on the ground for their project. We will be affected by their building activity during the next 2-3 years. I believe when they are coming to an end, we will see our own building activities commence. Until then, we have to secure funds to deal with the interim period when we will begin to repay the loan.

A word at the end

31. The WCC is moving forward on our common pilgrimage, even as we face many challenges. I believe God is calling the WCC to be a special instrument for the kingdom of God and its values. Together as a Council, a fellowship of churches, and together with many other churches and partners, we strive to follow Christ's way of justice and peace. May God bless our meeting and each one of us.