



echos

commission on youth in the ecumenical movement

Report of the first meeting
May 2007

Young people representing churches and ecumenical youth organizations gathered together in Geneva, Switzerland from May 5-9, 2007 for the first 'Youth Body' meeting. This body is the result of the young people's proposal at the World Council of Churches ninth assembly in Porto Alegre, Brazil, 2006 which was subsequently approved by the Council's highest governing body. The new consultative body consists of 25 young people from a broad cross-section of the ecumenical movement.¹

In this first meeting, the group was mandated to name itself—the term 'Youth Body' being a working name until the group was officially formed this year. After some discussion and theological reflection, we decided on the name *Echos—Commission on youth in the ecumenical movement*. We chose a name rooted in a biblical theme and understood in many languages. Echos is the transliterated word from the Greek word, *ἠχος*, meaning sound.

The 'Youth Body' was set up to be an "active think tank" to provide the World Council of Churches and ecumenical youth networks with new ideas and reflections of how young people can be, and are already, engaged in ecumenical work. We realized that our generation did not create many of the structures existing today. We are called to respond to the echos from the past of those ecumenical leaders — young and old—who have gone before us. We must also lay the groundwork for the youth that will come after this generation. So we hope to send our voices as echos into the future. One biblical reference to our name is revealed in the voice of John the Baptist who is speaking as an echo into the future: "The voice of one crying out in the wilderness: "Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight." (Luke 3:4)



Beyond sound, the Greek word is also used to signify roaring, fame, and rumour. In Hebrews 12:19 the writer uses this term to describe the noise of the trumpet that announces the grace of God; this is an announcement that should not be rejected. The connection of this term with the trumpet is significant because of the diverse ways that the trumpet was used in the Hebrew scriptures. The trumpet was not used to sound neutral information; it announced celebration, warning, preparation, action and movement. Importantly, when the writer of Hebrews reconnects "sound" and "trumpet," the voice produced is not neutral, but prophetic. "Blow the trumpet through the land; cry aloud and say, 'Assemble, and let us go into the fortified cities!' (Jeremiah 4:5) Today it is young people who must assume the role to mobilize and shape the ecumenical movement.



During the meeting, we had significant and fruitful discussions with Ecumenical Officers from the churches, who were also meeting in Geneva, and with WCC staff. Echos recognizes the importance of broadening and strengthening existing networks and groups, while stressing the need for intergenerational partnerships in the ecumenical movement. While Echos will work for renewal in the worldwide ecumenical movement and try to recapture the urgency of unity among Christians, we have also recognized the importance of bringing a mutual exchange between the WCC and grassroots level of the Churches.

Echos will look to find new ways of collaboration within the WCC member churches, but will also try to connect with churches currently outside the ecumenical movement. We also hope to be good ambassadors at home, and to share some of the realities on the ground with others. These are some of our most important challenges. We will develop the necessary mechanisms to help the youth and global ecumenists to confront some of the challenges that they face in living out our call to be one.

Until the next WCC assembly, Echos has identified four areas of focus for our work:



1. Ecumenical Formation

- Building resources
- Capacity building
- Networking models

2. Networking and Communication

- Using the WCC website to post information for the youth
- Creating online links with WCC commissions and other ecumenical bodies
- Creating and distributing a newsletter, focused on reaching those who do not have access to the internet

3. Collaboration

- Assuring adequate youth participation in all WCC activities through close collaboration with WCC staff
- A day dedicated to youth involvement at the World Mission conference, Edinburgh 2010
- At least 20% youth participation in Edinburgh, 2010

4. Youth Engagement

- Increasing ecumenical youth engagement in confronting the challenges of globalization and spirituality
- Active participation of youth in the Decade to Overcome Violence: Churches Seeking Reconciliation and Peace 2001-2010 (DOV) especially towards the International Ecumenical Peace Convocation in 2011.

Echos is utilizing the internet and a Yahoo! group, along with other means, to carry out its work. We will have online meetings until we meet again in 2008. For more information about the purpose of Echos and discussion starter resources for young people, churches, and ecumenical organizations, we are currently creating a DVD with highlights from our first meeting. To learn more or to connect churches and ecumenical youth networks with Echos please contact the WCC: nma@wcc-coe.org



ⁱ **Vision:** The vision for the Youth Body is two-fold. *In relation to the WCC:* To ensure the sustainable and active involvement of young adults in all levels of the WCC by developing their leadership skills and advocating for broader participation of young adults in the WCC. This can be achieved only through honest intergenerational partnership and dialogue. *In the broader ecumenical context:* To broaden and strengthen the ecumenical movement through networking with young adults from local, regional and global ecumenical organizations (within and outside the WCC constituency) and facilitating a space for exchange.

Composition: The Youth Body is designed to work closely with ecumenical youth organizations in the regions. The WCC Youth Programme will receive direct insights and impulses from the WCC Youth Body. The Youth Body will uniquely gather those from WCC governing bodies and wider representation of other young people active in the ecumenical movement. Bringing together voices from WCC governing bodies along with young people from the broader constituency will facilitate more interaction and accountability. The Youth Body will consist of twenty-five (25) young people (18-30 years).

Excerpt from 'Proposal to establish a WCC Youth Body,' WCC, Central Committee, September 2006: <http://www.oikoumene.org/en/resources/documents/central-committee/geneva-2006/reports-and-documents/proposal-to-establish-a-wcc-youth-body.html>. More information about the development of the *Echos-Commission of youth in the ecumenical movement* can be found on the WCC website: <http://www.oikoumene.org>