



# Transforma mundo

World Council of Churches 9th Assembly |

Porto Alegre, 14 February 2006

#1

## Today in Porto Alegre

### Bem-vindos à Porto Alegre!

Inspired by its central theme, the assembly's opening ceremony in the afternoon conveys, in music, drama and dance, a message about our capacity to transform the world, about the importance of material and spiritual communion, work and sharing. Welcomes from the assembly leadership and hosts are followed by greetings from church and political leaders from around the world.

### Preparing the journey

Participants receive advice on how consensus procedures will work in an orientation session, and review activities within the ecumenical fellowship between the 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> assemblies. Members of the WCC's governing bodies use images, story-telling and sound to present key insights and lessons from the *Harare to Porto Alegre* report.

### Spiritual life

The opening service is built around the prayer chosen as the 9<sup>th</sup> Assembly's theme: "God, in your grace, transform the world." The emphasis on the last two words of the prayer invites participants to reflect on transformation in the here and now of "the world." The sermon is given by Archbishop Anastasios of Tirana, head of the Orthodox Church of Albania.

Webcasts, texts, photos and more on [www.wcc-assembly.info](http://www.wcc-assembly.info)

<b>Number of the day</b>	<span style="font-size: 48pt; font-weight: bold; color: #0070C0;">691</span> Number of delegates registered for the 9 <sup>th</sup> Assembly
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### Let us pray

"O God of the East, the West, the North and the South, your love has conceived your creation, your Word has brought it into being and your Spirit has endowed it with your life. In the promise of your transforming grace we beseech you Lord, hear us and have mercy."

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Paulino Menezes

Energy and excitement characterized prayer at the pre-Assembly Youth event

# Transformation!

Thousands of Christians from around the world converge on Porto Alegre today for the opening of the 9<sup>th</sup> Assembly of the World Council of Churches (WCC), expected to be the broadest ecumenical gathering in the early 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Transformation is the central focus of this event, as participants pray, reflect and dialogue together on the assembly theme, "God, in your grace, transform the world."

The assembly will mark a "new phase in ecumenism" and a "coming of age" for the ecumenical movement, according to WCC general secretary the Rev. Dr. Samuel Kobia. Delegates will discuss new forms of work and priori-

ties for the WCC in the coming years. They will decide how the WCC will work with a consensus model of decision making, aimed at strengthening full participation of all members of the fellowship.

The assembly organisers confirm that 691 delegates representing the 348 Protestant, Orthodox, Anglican, United and other member churches of the Council will be joined by more than 3,000 guests, advisors and observers, as well as other participants who will attend the 200 *Mutirão* workshops and exhibitions which will accompany the main plenaries and business sessions. The *Mutirão* is a new feature of the assembly, providing a space

for reflection, celebration and presentations to the broader ecumenical family.

Youth participation will be highly visible at the gathering. Youth delegates, stewards and other visitors will be fully involved in the core programme, shaping the vision and priorities for the future, as well as in a series of special youth events.

The 9<sup>th</sup> assembly will be a "praying assembly." The spiritual life of the assembly is expected to be a highlight, as the participants pray each morning and evening in the traditions and languages of various churches and cultures. Participants will join daily Bible studies and worship with local congregations on Sunday.

# By the way...

## Are we ever so slightly mad?

"A perfectly mad adventure" is how J.H. Oldham, a foremost pioneer of the World Council of Churches, used to describe the ecumenical mission. Those gathering at Porto Alegre with all their hopes and anxieties, expectations and questions, are writing a new chapter of a long story that has always involved vision, courage and risk-taking in the face of seemingly impossible challenges in the world and the churches.

Their ecumenical parents and grandparents at the first assembly at Amsterdam in 1948 gathered under the theme "Man's Disorder and God's Design." They met in a world so recently torn apart by war and now threatened by a new "cold war" of ideological confrontation and atomic weaponry. They met as churches still, in many ways, strangers to each other. But they declared, "We intend to stay together." We are here today because they - and those who followed them - stayed true to that vision and lived out their calling to build unity, to serve human need and to declare God's word of justice, reconciliation and peace, however mad that seemed at times.

"God, in your grace, transform the world" invites those at Porto Alegre to be the new pioneers. No doubt some have been told by folk back home that they are slightly mad to come here. Some will have been told, yet again, that ecumenism is a dangerous game of compromising their confessional and cultural identity. At the other extreme, some voices will have declared that the agenda of challenges such as the global economy, violence, climate change and the HIV and AIDS pandemic is beyond the capacity of the institutions of ecumenism, and the churches themselves, to make a real difference. Or that Christian ecumenism is now irrelevant in a world where the real issues lie in relations between all the major religions.

We are indeed being invited to be, in human eyes, a bit mad at this assembly, because we pray in both gratitude and hope for transforming grace. Such prayer acknowledges realities but leaves no room for cynicism or defeatist pessimism. The bottom line is the readiness to be *surprised*: surprised by new possibilities in relationships between our churches and by unforeseen opportunities to make a difference in our world.

Is it too much to suggest that the Holy Spirit is already gearing us up to be surprised by grace here in Porto Alegre? There is already an atmosphere of newness: in the majority of actual church delegates being newcomers; in the unprecedentedly high proportion of youth participants; in the first experiment with a new method of participatory decision-making; in the unexpected wave of so many more people wanting to come and share in the *Mutirao* and the event as a whole; and perhaps above all in the experience of meeting in Latin America, where the vibrancy of churches witnessing to transforming grace in the midst of pain comes as a long-awaited gift to the whole ecumenical family.

At Porto Alegre there is every opportunity for continuing the perfectly mad adventure.

Angelos



## Amsterdam 1948

**Due largely to war, the first WCC assembly had to wait 10 years after the constitution had been agreed on at Utrecht in 1938. At Amsterdam there was already controversy as U.S. politician John Foster Dulles and Hungarian theologian Joseph Hromadka clashed on how Christians should respond to Soviet communism. But the churches agreed to stay together in a fellowship transcending ideological division.**

## Bate-papo

### Youth challenge the not-so-young

In seven gatherings at the assembly, the younger generation will meet the older generation in half-hour dialogue and questioning sessions. The young people will challenge the older generation as to what they have done and, perhaps even more importantly, what they have *not* done to create a better world for all.

The sessions are billed as *Bate-Papo*, the Portuguese phrase for 'informal chat.'

The older generation, including ecumenical celebrities and even a Nobel laureate or two, will dialogue with the younger generation, tackling the following issues and questions:

- Is there a future for Christianity in the 21<sup>st</sup> century?
- Mission in the struggles for life
- Being church in a globalized world
- Victims as healers, building peace in a context of violence
- Indigenous people, visions and challenges
- Young people, agents of change
- Understanding God as a woman, in the context of present-day theology

*Bate-Papo* sessions will take place from 12.45 to 13.15 daily, from February 15-22 (except Sunday), in the theatre of building 40.

The challenge from the younger generation at tomorrow's meeting will come from Jantine Huwelink of the Netherlands, and be addressed to the Rev. Richard Skleba of the United States.

# “Walk beside us,” Indigenous people tell churches

Indigenous people from around the globe have had a special place in the church for much of its life. But all too often that place has been destructive of their physical, spiritual and cultural heritage. These first nations of the colonized world have been seen as objects of mission rather than people of the living God.

These first nations are represented in the 9th Assembly through the Indigenous Peoples Programme. At a pre-Assembly meeting, some 50 Indigenous representatives praised the WCC’s attempts to support millions of the world’s people who are, as one Masai participant described it, “the memory of the earth.”

In 1995 an office for Indigenous people was established at the Ecumenical Centre in Geneva, Switzerland. In 2003 it moved to La Paz, Bolivia, which is one of only two countries in the world with an Indigenous majority.

Issues facing the Indigenous

are massive. With their deep spiritual relation to the land, they see how little is left to them. Among the poorest, they are surrounded by development and dominated by the globalised economy. The loss of land

means loss of what they call “our rootedness.” Their languages, their ways of worship, their innate spirituality and age-old cultures are rapidly being assimilated.

Participants in the pre-As-

sembly gathering met with general secretary Dr Sam Kobia to express their thanks as well as some frustrations. “Please do not walk ahead of us or behind us,” they told him, “but walk as a WCC beside us

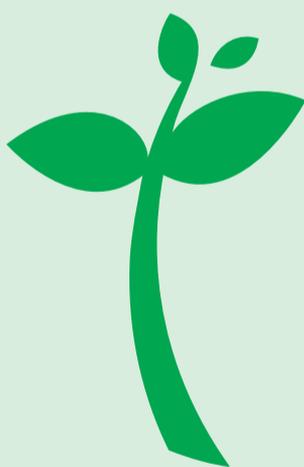
and we will walk beside you.”

Kobia responded by affirming his awareness of ways in which Indigenous cultures and lives had been “stolen” by academics, Western knowledge seekers, anthropologists and others. “While we have UN protocols on the protection of knowledge, they do not apply to your ancient cultures and knowledge, especially in the areas of medicinal knowledge, land, spirituality and culture,” he said. “Private ownership collects your knowledge, not for your good or the public good but for private gain.”

Participants in the pre-assembly gathering prepared a statement for the Assembly entitled “Transformation from within – Indigenous voices and the life of the church.” The statement describes Indigenous peoples as “the voice of the land, the voice of the water, the voice of the air,” and calls for greater inclusion of Indigenous peoples in WCC structures.



Paulino Menezes



## Assembly urged to redefine gender roles

Men in leadership positions will not give up power easily, WCC general secretary the Rev. Dr Samuel Kobia told participants in the pre-Assembly women’s gathering 10-13 February. Therefore, women should continue in their struggle for social transformation, he said.

In the last century the change in the role of women from homemakers to persons with careers outside the home has had an impact on both women and family life, Kobia said. But this has not yet led to changes in the roles of men.

“The role of men needs to change for the transformation

to make sense in the Assembly and beyond,” Kobia declared.

In one session of the women’s gathering Dr Elaine Neuenfelt pointed out that weeping, regarded by patriarchal societies as indicative of weakness, can be transformed into an act of empowerment and healing. Neuenfelt, a professor at the Superior College of Theology in Porto Alegre, said that in the Bible the weeping of women is a prophetic exercise that gives testimony of the word of God in daily life.

In an interview, Louise Bakala Komouno from the Evangelical Church in Congo Brazzaville said

there were very few women in church leadership positions in sub-Saharan Africa. She urged the church to give training to women to equip them.

Sylvia Lisk Vanhaverbeke, chair of the World Day of Prayer International (Canada), observed that since the Holy Spirit has no gender, the church needs to be on the leading edge of social transformation by setting an example of women becoming visible as leaders in faith.

Kobia proposed alternative strategies for women, which would include advocacy for economic justice. This puts the emphasis on just communities,

just relationships and a protective attitude to the earth. It would recognize the value of the caring role played by women in society, church and nation.

Another alternative, eco-feminism, draws parallels between violence against women and violence against the environment. Kobia also stressed the importance of making water a human right and a common good for humanity. He said activists on the issue oppose the privatisation of water, as it has become a source of conflict for the people who were closest to earth, the indigenous people.



# Worship in the big tent

The 9th assembly will be a “praying assembly.” Participants will gather in the tent for morning and evening prayers every day except Sunday.

Paulino Menezes

The large worship tent at the World Council of Churches (WCC) 9th Assembly in Porto Alegre is one of the main features of Assembly life. Some 3,700 participants from churches from all over the world will gather there for prayer twice a day.

This will be a praying Assembly. Its theme is itself a prayer: “God, in your grace, transform the world.” Its deliberations and discussions, its policies and programmes will be shaped by the spirit of prayer to the triune God - the Creator, Saviour and Sustainer of all.

The worship tent in Porto Alegre symbolizes the declared goal of the WCC to be a space where churches call one another to visible unity in one faith and one loving communion to worship the triune mystery of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

And yet, the Christians gathered here remain divided for reasons of history, belief, cultural practices and institutional structures. All are sadly aware that they cannot yet hold a common eucharistic celebration or any sacramental worship or, even less, an “ecumenical liturgy.” But this does not prevent them from expressing



their fervent and prayerful hope for the unity in Christ their Saviour, and affirming their common faith and trust in the power of the Holy Spirit who leads us into the truth.

Daily prayers will highlight the great diversity of cultures

and spiritual traditions represented in Porto Alegre. Prayers and hymns, signs and symbols, rites and rituals drawn from various streams of Christian tradition will be included. Yet care will be taken not to mix them up in a way that masks the par-

ticular identity of a tradition or offends the sensitivities of any member church of the WCC and, as far as possible, every tradition will be represented in its integrity.

Inter-confessional common prayer in the mornings will

draw on the liturgical resources of many confessions and traditions. The evening services will mostly be in the form of “confessional common prayer,” planned by a confessional family or tradition for the Assembly as a whole.

## The pre-assembly in pictures

Paulino Menezes



Igor Sperotto



Paulino Menezes



# A message from Latin American churches

In a letter to participants at the 9<sup>th</sup> Assembly of the WCC, leaders of the Latin America Council of Churches (CLAI) shared some of the learnings and challenges of churches in this region:

- Faced with a pragmatism that cares only for efficiency and measures time only in terms of profit, we have learned to create spaces where people can share their life stories, testimonies and aspirations.
- Where the obsession with wealth and power takes the upper hand, we have learned never to stop affirming the value of community life and the importance of the right to celebration and fulfilment.
- In response to the imposition of a "single frame of thought" we have learned to encourage a diversity of approaches to life.
- Where the meaning of life has been lost, we have learned

to value the human being, human dignity, self-esteem and hope.

• In the midst of a political and economic crisis as well as a crisis of ethics and values, we have learned that the churches must become communities of ethical resistance and healing.

We do not want to give a false impression of the situation of our churches. It is true that we have grown in number and we bear witness to our people's faith. But . . . we are also confronted with challenges and dilemmas, certain theological confusion and the marketing of religion. . . .

We want to share the following issues which are important for our churches in Latin America:

- Affirming a spirituality of commitment to mission and service.
- Imagining a different kind of

society based on the common good; a new concept of development that is sustainable and equitable and not limited to economic growth; participatory democracy and sound and credible institutions.

• Working together to find solutions to problems that affect everyday life including the external debt, integration without exclusion and the scandal of poverty, migration and displacement.

• Resisting injustice that brings death, with an ethic of life in its fullness.

• Renewing the leadership of the churches and the ecumenical movement. Young people challenge us with hopes and expectations to which we do not always have an answer.

Unceasingly proclaiming the Gospel of peace and healing for this world.



Paulino Menezes

Bishop Poma of Bolivia emphasises the Latin American message

## The world around the 9<sup>th</sup> Assembly

A changing world context will affect what takes place in Porto Alegre. In an article written before the 9<sup>th</sup> Assembly WCC general secretary the Rev. Dr Samuel Kobia reflected on some of the challenges facing Christians in today's world:

The 9<sup>th</sup> Assembly is being held at a time of widespread injustice, poverty and despair. The immense challenges which face humankind at this time call for careful discernment of the "signs of the times," and courageous visions of hope from the ecumenical movement. Our world is in need of profound transformation.

We live in an era marked by destructive power and disgraced human dignity. Economic and cultural globalization, new forms of militarism and domination, and ecological destruction have rarely been so evident. The prevailing international economic and political models have failed to stem the tide of injustice and inequality.

. . . Against the background of continuing conflict in Iraq and a war on terror, the Assembly will mark the completion of the first five years of the Decade to Overcome Violence. The Decade was launched by the WCC in 2001 as a way of mobilizing the churches' peacemaking efforts and resources. The question for the churches remains: how can we together foster a culture of peace, seek-



Paulino Menezes

The general secretary, Rev Dr Sam Kobia addresses a pre-assembly gathering

ing to restore the authentic nature of our humanity, in a context where violence has become so prevalent?

At the 8<sup>th</sup> Assembly in Harare, Zimbabwe in 1998, the WCC and the ecumenical movement made a commitment to walk in solidarity with Africa. Yet, as we meet, entire regions of the continent are once more facing famine. The condition of Africa challenges us to rethink what it would take to lift the continent out of poverty. It is evident that aid alone, however

massive, is not the answer, and that Africans' moral strength must be at the centre of any durable solution.



### World news

#### Election in Haiti

Thousands of people have taken to the streets in Haiti to demand that ex-president Rene Preval be declared the winner of last week's presidential election. With three-quarters of the votes counted, M. Preval is just short of the 50 percent required to win outright. M. Preval used to be an ally of former president Jean-Bertrand Aristide, who was forced out of power two years ago.

#### Prosecutions slow

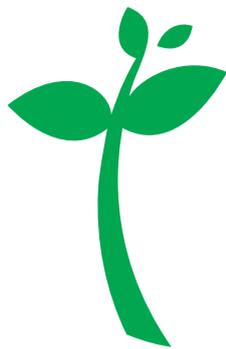
Criminal charges against United States soldiers for abuse of two Afghan prisoners who died in captivity were recommended by Army prosecutors. So far they have only resulted in 15 prosecutions.

## Pulóver de Evo para secretario general del CMI

Una replica del ya famoso pullover de Evo Morales fue entregado a Samuel Kobia, secretario general del Consejo Mundial de Iglesias (CMI), en reconocimiento por la labor del CMI por los derechos de los pueblos indígenas. El colorido pulóver fue entregado al secretario general luego de un intercambio sobre políticas de trabajo del CMI sobre temas indígenas en el que participaron delegados y delegadas de pueblos originarios de distintos continentes. El Dr. Kobia, durante su intervención en esta sesión, reconoció la contribución que han venido realizando los pueblos indígenas a la agenda de trabajo del CMI, creando conciencia sobre la necesidad de incluir la perspectiva indígena en el tratamiento de temas cruciales, tales como las políticas ambientales sustentables, con respeto por la creación, la justicia económica, y la transformación de las relaciones entre las personas y entre los pueblos con el fin de superar toda marginación y toda exclusión.

## La dulzura del compartir

En el ambiente previo a la Asamblea no solo se comparten las ideas. También las expresiones culturales establecen una especie de ágape entre los participantes. Este es el caso del libanés Fadi El Halabi, quien sorprendió a los participantes en la reunión de la Red Ecueménica de Defensa de las Personas Discapacitadas (EDAN) invitando a sus delegados a probar el Baklawa. El Blakawa es una especie pastel de hojaldre de manera cilíndrica, aunque puede tener otras formas, típico de la tradición de los países del Oriente Medio, hecho a base de miel y almendra, utilizándose la envoltura de esta para darle forma y consistencia al delicioso dulce. “Los traje porque sabía que me iba a reunir con muchas personas de diferentes partes del mundo y quería compartir con ellas algo especial de mi país –afirma el joven Fadi-. La Asamblea también puede ayudar a conocer mejor nuestras costumbres.”



## Bem-vindos à Porto Alegre!

Milhares de cristãos de todo o mundo encontram-se em Porto Alegre para a abertura da 9ª Assembléia do Conselho Mundial de Igrejas, com a expectativa de que este seja o maior movimento ecumênico do início do século 21. O convite para a Assembléia partiu das igrejas-membro do Conselho Mundial de Igrejas (CMI) e do Conselho Nacional de Igrejas Cristãs (Conic). As palavras de acolhida serão dadas pelo revmo. bispo metodista Adriel de Souza Maia, presidente do Conic. Também se inicia hoje o Mutirão, evento paralelo que reunirá diversas oficinas, incluindo estudos bíblicos, eventos e apresentações culturais. As atividades acontecem diariamente a partir das 12h45.

## Reunião fortalece voz de mulheres na Assembléia

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Cerca de 350 mulheres de todas as partes do mundo reuniram-se no Salão de Atos da PUC/RS, com o objetivo de preparar-se para a 9ª Assembléia do Conselho Mundial de Igrejas (CMI). As experiências colhidas nos três dias de reunião serão levadas à Assembléia, como contribuição para a discussão de políticas para o bem-estar das mulheres.

A coordenadora do Programa de Mulheres e da equipe de Justiça e Paz e Integridade da Criação do CMI, Aruna Gnanadason (Índia), acredita que a Pré-Assembléia permite que as mulheres cheguem melhor preparadas para as reuniões oficiais.

Christina Winnischofer, secretária-geral da Igreja Episcopal Anglicana do Brasil, ressalta que a reunião dá às mulheres condições de criar vínculos entre si, ao partilhar seus problemas e esperanças.

A representante do Comitê de Evangelismo da Catedral Nacional, Perfecta Stokes, das Filipinas, destaca que a participação feminina na Assembléia garante à mulher o direito a uma participação plena, re-



Mulheres de diferentes países do mundo, muitas com seus belíssimos e coloridos trajes típicos, penteados elegantes e flores na cabeça formavam um espetáculo à parte. As flores foram ofertadas pelas mulheres gaúchas, num gesto de acolhimento, lembrando as danças típicas do sul do Brasil.

fletindo-se também nas suas chances de liderança.

Durante a Pré-Assembléia foi exibido o filme “Contando nossas histórias”, sobre a visão ecumênica de cinco mulheres de diferentes partes do mundo, e lançado o livro

“A Graça do Mundo Transforma Deus”, uma paródia ao tema da Assembléia (Deus, em Tua Graça, Transforma o Mundo), organizado por Nancy Cardoso, Edla Eggert e André Musskopf, em português e inglês.

## Índios querem respeito às suas próprias religiões

Na Pré-Assembléia dos Povos Indígenas, o secretário-geral do Conselho Mundial de Igrejas (CMI), rev. Samuel Kobia, do Quênia, disse que é preciso impedir, a todo custo, a privatização da água. Ele lembrou que os governos têm obrigação de promover uma distribuição justa da água, que é uma dádiva de Deus e um direito de todas as pessoas. Falou também sobre a água como fonte de conflitos e informou que alguns países, como Quênia e Uganda, na África, já estudam como evitá-los.

Os povos indígenas destacaram dois pontos comuns: estão cansados das promessas de ajuda recebidas de várias instituições e querem ver respeitadas as par-

ticuliaridades de suas culturas e religiões. O rev. Samuel Kobia garantiu que essas são recomendações do CMI a todas as igrejas-membros e que ele, pessoalmente, havia pedido que fossem incluídos pelo menos 15% de indígenas nas diversas delegações.

O pastor metodista Adahyr Cruz, um dos fundadores do Comissão Nacional de Igrejas Cristãs (Conic), saudou o secretário-geral e destacou que o CMI pode fazer muito pelos povos indígenas em todo o mundo. Ele trabalha há dez anos com os índios guaranis e tupiniquins, que tiveram 11.800 hectares de suas terras ocupadas pela Aracruz Celulose e reivindicam a retomada da região.

## A graça de Deus como transformação para a inclusão

Na Pré-Assembléia da Rede Ecueménica em Defesa da Pessoa com Deficiência (EDAN), dr. Rogate R. Mshana, executivo da Comissão de Justiça, Paz e Integridade da Criação do CMI, destacou as preocupações trazidas pelas delegadas e convidadas. E enfatizou o fato que não se pode iniciar este diálogo sem uma real participação dessas pessoas na tomada de decisões, em qualquer nível.

A EDAN terá forte presença na Assembléia, buscando criar pautas para uma verdadeira ação de inclusão da igreja no mundo, para que, como política do CMI, condene a violência, a discriminação de mulheres, a discriminação de raças e das pessoas com capacidades diferentes, como fundamentos para compartilhar a verdadeira globalização: a graça de Deus como elemento transformador da condição humana.

## Jovens somam 41%

Os jovens chegaram à PUC antes do início da Assembléia, demonstrando garra e determinação ante os temas para os quais se preparam, antecipando-se ao que ocorrerá no Campus da PUC.

Com idades entre 18 e 30 anos, jovens vindos de diferentes lugares demonstraram sua ousadia em seus questionamentos, como: “Você reinventaria o Conselho Mundial de Igrejas e o movimento ecumênico?”, desafiou um dos jovens presentes. “Cristo é o único caminho para Deus e não a religião”, disse outro. “A sexualidade humana é um presente de Deus. É preciso compreender melhor como a Igreja vê a sexualidade”, desafiou um terceiro jovem. Ou ainda: “A tecnologia pode ser um importante meio para se alcançar pessoas que não conhecem a Cristo”, disse outro.

Mas o que arrancou aplausos da jovem platéia foi a fala de dois jovens, em especial. O primeiro deles, boliviano, que bradou em bom castelhano: “Estamos juntos na mesma sala,

unindo países pobres e ricos... Precisamos trabalhar juntos, enquanto jovens, em nossas igrejas. Precisamos trabalhar juntos, como Igreja, para erradicar a pobreza”. Outra fala de destaque foi de uma jovem africana, que falou a respeito da juventude que está morrendo em consequência do HIV/AIDS: “Em meu País, boa parte da população de 18 a 24 anos está infectada. Muitos estão morrendo e precisamos trabalhar nisso”.

Sempre com a firmeza de quem sabe o preço a pagar por seguir o Evangelho, especialmente em países de minoria cristã ou invadidos pela pobreza, ficou o senso de que “há sempre consequências políticas em se seguir o Evangelho”, como disse uma das jovens, mas que a Igreja deve assumir a voz dos excluídos.

A juventude estará bem representada no Mutirão que tem início hoje, já que os jovens totalizam 41% dos participantes em todos os tipos de eventos que acontecem ao longo da Assembléia.

## Features



## Disabled people challenge WCC on inclusivity



Disabled people try to affirm the church as an inclusive community. But the struggle for recognition at the decision-making levels of the World Council of Churches will be long and difficult, they say. It was only at the 1998 Harare Assembly

that the Ecumenical Disability Advocates Network (EDAN) was established as a full programme of the WCC.

General secretary Dr Sam Kobia met with the disabled participants during pre-Assembly meetings and committed himself and the

Geneva headquarters to their full inclusion in all programmes.

In a classroom packed with people living with a wide variety of disabilities, Kobia challenged the EDAN leadership to make their presence heard and felt in Porto Alegre "because it

has been a major omission at previous assemblies."

He continued: "You will have to be a very visible presence. You have performed exceptionally well since Harare and are already a world-wide network that has been faithful to the vision of an inclusive ecumenical movement."

EDAN has its headquarters in Nairobi under the full-time coordination of Samuel Kabue, a blind Kenyan. Kabue stressed, however, that EDAN is not an African programme but a full part of the WCC.

Kobia said EDAN has earned a well-deserved reputation for action and efficiency in its short WCC life, noting that "in a world that is not enabling to disabled people, EDAN presents a different attitude to the 9th Assembly and you must come up with a strong statement of what transformation means - a perspective that brings a critical view of transforming the world."

The pre-Assembly group challenged the general secretary about their lack of official representation. "Who in these disabled, male-dominated churches are going to give up one of their precious delegates to the disabled?" they asked. "How do

we get on programme and policy reference committees, let alone the central and executive committees, so that our concerns are taken seriously and your vaunted inclusion becomes a reality?"

Another contradiction that EDAN participants noted was the use of "we-they" language in WCC material, indicating that disabled people were outside the overall ecumenical movement because of their situation. Kobia was pushed to educate staff and other members of the ecumenical movement to practise inclusion as well as talking about it. Another participant complained that the blind cannot read WCC material.

Kobia acknowledged their frustration, but urged them to work with him to transform the processes and get things done visibly and effectively. "There is no doubt the institutional culture of the WCC must be changed," he said. He was especially critical of the attitude of many African churches towards the ministry to disabled people.

As Kobia left, he was gently reminded by Kabue that "We will be watching you carefully."

## Youth unite voices at pre-assembly event

In the months leading up to the World Council of Churches 9th assembly, much was made of a desire to include large numbers of young people and to make their voices heard.

A Youth pre-assembly meeting in Porto Alegre 11-13 February began to flesh out that goal. About 250 youth participants (defined as those aged 30 and under) gathered to connect, learn, share, and see how they might indeed have an impact over the next two weeks.

Events included community-building, sharing in small "ho-

me groups," regional meetings, daily prayers and Bible study and preparation for the assembly, as well as late-evening outings sponsored by local Brazilian youth groups.

"The community building piece really is the important one," said Lara Blackwood, a steward from the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in the United States. "For us to be able to be comfortable enough to speak (in this forum) can be hard. Having that community built so we don't feel like we're speaking alone is really empowering."

General secretary Rev. Dr Samuel Kobia addressed the group in a packed auditorium one evening, sharing reflections on youth involvement in the WCC. "(The Assembly) can transform you, and you can transform the Assembly as well," he said. "Without young people, we cannot have the kind of challenge that has kept the ecumenical movement active and relevant."

Kobia suggested goals of having youth elected as one or more regional presidents and as a significant part of the WCC central committee.

Most youth seemed to embrace enthusiastically the challenge of having an impact on the Assembly and the WCC as a whole. A more difficult question arose on how to do that. Changing a decades-old institution with a complex structure doesn't happen easily.

"I'm hearing these words about renewal of the ecumenical movement, but I'm looking for a tangible framework for change and I'm not seeing it yet," said Alison Preston, a youth delegate from the Anglican Church of Australia. Preston said much good has come from the ecumenical movement, but it may be time to reconsider its structure for a new era. Youth, she added, may be able to take the lead in that reconceptualizing.

"If we really are open to transformation, we could look to successful movements that

have emerged in recent years," she said, pointing to models such as the Make Poverty History campaign. "People worry that ecumenism itself might be dying, but it's not - it's just the form."

Youth were already mobilizing for some change by the end of the pre-Assembly gathering. With regions often reticent to nominate youth for WCC president positions in the past, youth suggested the idea of a global representative from the youth community who would serve as a WCC president.

About 15 percent of delegates at the Assembly are expected to be youth, and 150 youth stewards will assist its operation. Another 250 Latin American youth will participate in a camp nearby. All youth, delegates or not, have been invited to participate fully in all ecumenical conversations.

## Things you need to know

### Information Centre

Answers to all your questions can be found on the ground floor of building 50. There is a satellite information desk outside the plenary hall.

### Assembly Choir

Drawn from many local churches, this ecumenical choir will gather in the tent each morning at 7.30, in preparation for morning prayer.

### University chapel

This may be used for private prayer and meditation when not being used for eucharistic celebrations.

### Medical help

On campus, those needing emergency medical assistance should go to the mobile medical unit located outside building 7.

### Pastoral care

Assembly life can be complex and challenging. Qualified voluntary counsellors are available in room 407 in building 40 for those who need to talk. In case of sexual harassment, the solidarity care team can be reached in room 413 building 41.

### Internet connection

Free access is available for

the use of all participants in buildings 50 and 40.

### Media Centre

Accredited media are welcome at the Media Centre on the 6<sup>th</sup> floor of building 40.



Workers preparing exhibition space

### WCC Shop

Books and souvenirs can be found in the exhibition centre next to the plenary hall.

## Announcements

### Acting Together

Test your knowledge about major justice issues through daily quizzes. Answers will be posted at the "Acting Together - Transforming the World" exhibit (number 18). The first 1 000 people to come to the exhibit with their answers get a free coloured wristband.

The quiz and wristbands are a joint project of ACT International, ECLOF, Ecumenical Advocacy Alliance, Ecumenical Water Network, and the WCC's economic justice programme.

### NCCs & REOs

Representatives of National Councils of Churches and Regional Ecumenical Organisations are invited to a dinner meeting on 16<sup>th</sup> February at 20.00 in the Ipanema Room at the Holiday Inn. Transport is on bus number 6. Please confirm attendance by written reply in the box outside room 714 in building 40, or with Mr Hubert van Beek.

Photos: Paulino Menezes

## Talking Ecumenically

An important part of the assembly will be the Ecumenical Conversations, which will provide a space for delegates to share their experiences in addressing key concerns for the future of their churches and their common witness and action. Background information can be found in the Programme Book. For further details, visit the Information Desk on the ground floor of Building 50.



### CONVERSATION INFORMATION

	REGISTERED (9/02/06)	ROOM
A 01 : Mission for Healing and Reconciling Communities	82	P40 - Theatre
A 02 : Religious Plurality is Embraced and Feared	80	P9 - Auditorium
A 03 : Becoming a Community of Women and Men: Learning from Women's Ways of Being Church	44	B50 - 901
A 04 : Human Sexuality: Body and Soul; World and Church	65	B50 - 902
A 05 : Keeping the Faith in a Cyber-World: Christian Communities and New Technologies	42	B50 - 301
A 06 : Disabled People: A Church of All and For All	21	B50 - 302
B 07 : Challenges on the Way to Unity: Seeking an Ecumenical Response for Today	81	P9 - 209
B 08 : Emerging Forms of Ecumenism	68	P40 - Auditorium
B 09 : Challenges to Diakonia Today: Seeking an Ecumenical Response	53	P50 - Auditorium
B 10 : Memories and Renewed Quest for Ecumenical Formation	24	B50 - 807
B 11 : Youth transforming the Ecumenical Landscape	72	P7 - Auditorium
C 12 : Walking in Truth, Speaking with Power	32	B50 - 808
C 13 : Protecting Peoples' Lives and Human Dignity	38	B50 - 809
C 14 : Churches Responding to New Threats to Peace and Human Security	55	P11 - Auditorium
C 15 : Building Hospitable Communities: Responding to Migration	28	B50 - 801
C 16 : Public Life, Religion and Politics: Ambiguities and Possibilities	64	B50 - 804
D 17 : The Scandal of Poverty and Growing Inequality	88	Salao de Atos
D 18 : Overcoming Health Threats to Humanity in the Context of HIV & AIDS	36	B50 - 802
D 19 : Witnessing to the Sanctity of Life: Bioethics and the Challenges of New Technologies	35	B50 - 813
D 20 : Co-existence in God's Creation: Caring for the Earth's Resources	36	B50 - 814
D 21 : The Agenda of Racism: A priority for the Churches	26	B50 - 803
D 22 : Zero Tolerance for Violence Against Women and Children	33	B50 - 810

**Total Participants**

**1103**



World Council of Churches  
9th Assembly Newspaper  
"Transforma O Mundo"

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