



World Council of Churches

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To members of the
WCC Executive Committee

Geneva, 19 July 2007

Dear friends,

Peace from God our Father and our common Lord Jesus Christ!

A few words on peace in the Middle East:

June 2007, the 40th anniversary of the 1967 Arab-Israeli war, was an historic month for peace in the Middle East. It was an intensive month within the WCC constituency too.

Together with a number of my staff colleagues, I was personally involved in convening or promoting various ecumenical events and initiatives that involved member churches and related organizations. The focus was the urgency of a just, negotiated peace for both Palestinians and Israelis. There were three major events led by the WCC, with broad participation from the membership and beyond.

June 3-9, a joint advocacy initiative known as "International Church Action for Peace in Palestine and Israel" generated a week of church and public activities, and messages to governments, in North America, Europe, Africa, Asia, Australia and the Middle East.

June 17-21, representatives of WCC member churches and related organizations from six continents, including some of the most senior church leaders of the Middle East, and WCC we – 130 participants altogether – met in Jordan's capital for an international peace conference. Under the heading 'Churches together for Peace and Justice in the Middle East', we heard from the churches of the region and from other churches with experience of endemic conflict and violence, including Colombia, Sri Lanka and South Africa.

The conference concluded by launching the Palestine-Israel Ecumenical Forum and issuing the 'Amman Call'. The declaration – along the lines I had suggested in my inaugural speech – calls the forum to be guided by three imperatives: the ethical imperative for a just peace, the ecumenical

imperative for unity in action, and the Gospel imperative for costly solidarity. In a special inauguration ceremony at the traditional site of Christ's baptism, we planted on the banks of the Jordan river as a symbol of peace an olive tree donated by Palestinian Christians.

June 21-26, I led a four-person delegation to Jerusalem. We met with the heads of local churches, government officials, civil society organizations and local parish and community members. Among the churches, we found much encouragement at the conference in Amman, with many looking in hope to the WCC fellowship to play a stronger role in supporting local struggles for a just peace.

As a WCC delegation, we got a first-hand introduction to the work of the Ecumenical Accompaniment Programme in Palestine/Israel (EAPPI). "Ecumenical accompaniers are the eyes and ears of the ecumenical family in the midst of the conflict on the ground," I declared at the end of a memorable tour of gates, checkpoints, and empty streets with closed shops.

We met the mufti of Jerusalem and Palestine and the two chief rabbis of Israel. Education for peace and inter-religious cooperation were on the agenda. We also visited Christian holy sites in Jerusalem, Nazareth and Bethlehem, and Muslim and Jewish holy sites in Jerusalem and Hebron.

With all these on our agenda, the update on the Officers meeting comes to you with great delay. We apologize for this and ask for your kind understanding.

The Officers Meeting:

The Officers met at the end of May here at the Ecumenical Centre. Rev. Dr. Walter Altman, the moderator of the central committee and H.E. Metropolitan Dr. Gennadios of Sassima, vice-moderator, were with us. Unfortunately Rev. Dr. Margaretha Hendriks-Ririmasse was unable to participate in the meeting because her church called her away on urgent business.

We presented and discussed extensively the "Vision and Purpose of the Work of the WCC", a document included in the "WCC Programme Plans 2008-2013 Summary – *With Project outlines 2008-2010*", which you will receive soon in view of the executive committee, for further discussion and approval.

We have also discussed the functions of the governing bodies and evaluation of the governing body meetings. The Officers encouraged the staff to continuing to work on the two background documents that were presented on WCC governance.

A few preliminary proposals were presented to the Officers with regard to the WCC 60th anniversary celebrations in 2008. These were extensively discussed and the Officers offered their input.

An account was given of the events, meetings and discussions which had taken place since the last executive committee meeting in February and

March of this year. There was an update on the change process and the week of meetings. Brief reports were given on the:

- JWG Executive Committee
- WCC Round Table
- Joint Commission on WCC and CWCs
- F&O Officers Meeting
- CWME
- Youth Body
- DOV IEPC process
- Middle East programme

The Officers made the following decisions:

- 1) The final membership of the Faith and Order Commission is to be circulated to the Officers prior to the executive committee meeting in September 2007.
- 2) Bishop Martin Schindehütte (EKD) and Ms. Margaretha Grape (Church of Sweden) are elected to the WCC central and executive committees in place of Bishop Rolf Koppe and Ms. Inger Aasa-Marklund respectively.
- 3) A vice-moderator for the programme committee of the central committee can be named at the next meeting of the programme committee.
- 4) The sub committees of the executive committee shall be moderated by the Officers who may delegate this task as appropriate (e.g. to the programme and finance committee moderators).
- 5) A consensus training session will be scheduled for December 5-7, 2007 in conjunction with the Officers meeting. The moderators of the sub committees of the central committee and the moderators of the four commissions shall be invited to participate.
- 6) The draft agenda of the executive committee in September 2007, including items for public issues, was accepted.
- 7) Mark Johnson was named to the Pension Board as Boudewyn Sjollem had not accepted the invitation to participate on behalf of the WCC.
- 8) Staffing:
 - a) Dietrich Werner (EKD, Germany) was appointed for a two-year term as consultant for ETE (P5)
 - b) Fulata Moyo (Presebyterian Church of Southern Africa, Malawi) was appointed programme executive for women (P1)
 - c) A vacancy was opened for programme executive on ecumenical lay formation (P5)
 - d) Christopher Ferguson (UCC, Canada), programme executive for the UN Liaison Office in New York (P3) was extended for two years.

The Officers requested the following actions:

- 1) The Faith and Order Commission and the Commission on World Mission and Evangelism are strongly encouraged to plan a joint commission meeting.
- 2) The WCC GS to write is to the members of the central committee asking them for a postal vote on whether Ms. Marloes Keller

(Protestant Church in the Netherlands) can replace Rev. Wies Houweling who resigned from the central committee.

- 3) The executive committee members should receive documentation for the upcoming meeting in a timely manner and an annotated agenda should also be supplied.

Finally, the Officers recommended that WCC events should take place in countries that are not often visited by WCC.

Looking towards the forthcoming executive committee meeting:

I understand that some of you are already in touch with our offices and have started planning your travel to Armenia. My colleagues are at your disposal for any further information or assistance you may need. Do not hesitate to contact them.

As a foretaste of our deliberations, please find attached the draft agenda of our meeting, as approved by the Officers. You will receive, in a later stage, an annotated version of it, as requested by the Officers.

We all look forward discovering the life and witness of the Armenian Apostolic Church at the Holy See of Etchmiadzin and enjoying Armenian hospitality.

With every good wish, yours in Christ,



Rev. Dr. Samuel Kobia
General Secretary