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MINUTE ON IRAN AND THE MIDDLE EAST REGIONAL CRISIS

1. In repeated statements over many years, the World Council of Churches has called for governments to exercise their responsibilities for bringing peace with justice to the peoples of the Middle East. Yet today – from Iraq to Lebanon to Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territories – unresolved conflicts are scarring the region. The lives of countless women, children and men are shattered, families are torn apart, and whole communities are held hostage to injustice and violence.
2. Increasingly, the prospect for peace in each place is linked to progress toward peace across the whole region. Just and durable solutions to the violence and instability in Iraq, Israel/Palestine and Lebanon will require constructive shifts in governmental policies across the region and internationally, most especially in the cases of Iran, Israel, Syria, Lebanon and the United States, as well as the other foreign powers involved.
3. Threats to begin another war in the Middle East defy the lessons of both history and ethics. We refer to the belligerent stance of the US toward Iran and of Iranian threats against the US and Israel. The region and its people must not suffer another war, let alone one that is unlawful, immoral and ill-conceived once again.
4. Disputes will yield to good faith negotiations, now as in the past. The success slowly emerging from US-North Korean and the six-party talks is a relevant example. Multi- and bilateral approaches are necessary in the regional crisis affecting the Middle East as well. Churches in the region and beyond are looking for new levels of courage and accountability for peace from the governments involved, including:
 - i. US-Iranian and multi-party negotiations to settle outstanding nuclear issues as well as achieve a *modus vivendi* regarding the respective national interests in Iraq and the wider region. This must include Iranian compliance with International Atomic Energy Agency and United Nations Security Council directives and US adherence to its 1995 pledge against nuclear weapons use against non-nuclear signatories of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty including Iran (Executive Committee, Bossey, 2006).
 - ii. Israel, Iran and their respective allies taking steps to reduce the threatening postures of Israel and Iran, including Israel's prompt and unconditional accession to the NPT as called for by the UN General Assembly and the full compliance of Iran noted above (Executive Committee, 2006).
 - iii. Initiatives by Israel, its neighbours and the parties to the Arab Peace Initiative, by the US, the European Union, Russia and the United Nations to finally end the 40-year occupation of Palestinian territories and establish a viable Palestinian state in East Jerusalem, the West Bank and the Gaza Strip in accordance with the relevant UN resolutions.
 - iv. Return of the Golan Heights to Syria as part of a comprehensive Syrian-Israeli accord that resolves *inter alia* outstanding issues for both countries in respect of the sovereignty of Lebanon.

- v. Reversing the recent trend in the West and among Western allies in the region to focus on and promote Sunni-Shia differences, including marked reductions in international and regional transfers of arms to Sunni and Shiite groups.
 - vi. The withdrawal of all US forces from Iraq and the implementation of alternative Iraqi and multilateral political, economic and security programs (Central Committee, Geneva, 2005).
5. Resolving these regional problems, especially those that have become *causes celebres* across the Muslim world and beyond, is essential for ending the current spiral of violence in Iraq, Lebanon and Israel/Palestine. Non-state armed groups will continue to find resources, recruits and opportunities to use violence against US, Israeli and Iraqi targets unless these issues are addressed.

Recommendation:

- A. Member churches of the WCC are urged to impress upon their governments their acute concern that the US and its allies must settle the dispute over Iran's nuclear programme through negotiations and not through the use of military force. Governments should also be encouraged to convey this international church concern to the US and its allies.
- B. This international church position against attacking Iran seeks protection for all the populations involved, including the US and Israeli publics. Years of unilateralist military incursions in the Middle East have compromised human security and national well-being across the region and left many people vulnerable.
- C. The position also reflects the churches' conviction -- in an age impatient for new and shared solutions to global problems -- that negotiated solutions are the only path to peace for the Middle East and for a world increasingly destabilized by the regional crisis there.