

**World Council of Churches
EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE
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STATEMENT ON IRAQ AND ITS CHRISTIAN COMMUNITIES

1. The basic well-being and human rights of substantial portions of Iraqi society are heavily degraded after decades of wars and chaos, and remain under grave threat. Yet the suffering of the Iraqi people remains largely unrecognized and unresolved. The Executive Committee of the World Council of Churches, meeting in Etchmiadzin, Armenia, 25-28 September, 2007, is deeply troubled by their suffering and calls urgently for solutions. Amid the many suffering communities there, we note that the fate of Iraq's Christian communities gives churches around the world particular cause for concern and reason to respond.
2. Churches of the WCC have raised many warnings and sought to provide hope to the people of Iraq. We recall *inter alia*:

The Central Committee urging sustained diplomacy instead of war (Geneva, 2002); that the current war is immoral, ill-advised and in breach of the United Nations Charter, that the UN Security Council withdraw the open-ended mandate it had given to the occupation of Iraq, for a collective international commitment to support the people of Iraq including reparations by the occupying powers for damages caused by the unlawful use of force (Geneva, 2003); and that the US-led military presence be reduced and terminated, the US adhere to international law on the treatment of prisoners and churches overseas advocate for and assist Christians to stay in Iraq (Geneva, 2005);

The Executive Committee judging the sanctions imposed on Iraq to have failed to meet the necessary criteria while causing serious violations of human rights (Geneva, 1998); and that the impending war “will cause a humanitarian crisis of grave magnitude with untold suffering...loss of life, property, environmental damage and waste of precious resources” and “polarise division and hatred between communities resulting in further destabilization of the regions” (Bossey, February 2003).

The Iraqi people

3. Today one-third of the Iraqi population is in need of humanitarian assistance. More than half of Iraqis live in abject poverty or worse (54 percent), according to a recent Iraqi government survey. One Iraqi in six is internally uprooted or among the two million people who have fled the country. All of these groups experience severe and chronic deficits in food security, in access to clean water, sanitation, health services and education, and in possibilities to earn a livelihood.
4. Poverty, deprivation and human insecurity are extremely high in Iraq. Effective allocations of national and international resources to remedy these ills are very low. Exploitation of the country's vast petroleum resources provides little overall benefit to the Iraqi people. Nevertheless, massive expenditures for military and security programs continue with no end in sight to the conflict and insecurity at which they are directed.
5. Iraq's dire humanitarian situation developed during the latter years of Saddam Hussein's regime and the sanctions imposed on Iraq. Its national traumas include dictatorship, the Iran-Iraq war, and the first Gulf War. Since the current US-led invasion, public health surveys indicate that conflict has caused hundreds of thousands more deaths and driven more than four million people from their communities.

6. The prevalence of violence by non-state armed groups, regular armed forces and criminal groups affects people in most parts of Iraq, causing heavy casualties, fear, deprivation and emigration.
7. Based on experiences with the chronic insecurity that has set in since the invasion of 2003, national and international NGOs including church organizations have limited but still significant opportunities to deliver effective humanitarian assistance under current circumstances.
8. However, international recognition and action on the humanitarian crisis in Iraq is lacking. Internationally, a climate of silence about their fate prevails instead. The silence is punctuated by daily reports of casualty figures but appears to be sustained by the reluctance of governments to engage in the difficult international political task of working out solutions to the Iraq crisis.

Iraq's Christian communities

9. Although Christians represent only four percent of Iraq's population, they make up 40 percent of its refugees. Their fate speaks twice, informing overseas churches about both the general humanitarian needs in Iraq and the urgency of saving Iraq's Christian communities.
10. On the one hand, the current Christian exodus is but one of many warnings that radically new approaches to Iraq's crisis are needed. Strategies based on the use of force have driven the country into chaos. To continue them has the effect of adding new fuel to a raging fire. The flight of Christians from Iraq is a sign of the failure of policies that were purported to bring stability and peace to Iraq and even the region.
11. Traumas that affect Christian communities -- violent attacks, incessant fear, frequent kidnappings, social upheaval, economic collapse and attacks on houses of worship -- also affect Iraqi society at large. Members of all religious communities in Iraq are now displaced or have fled the country. The fate of Christians must not be seen in isolation from the fate of Muslims, or of other minorities such as the Yazidees and Mandeans, or used to worsen relations with Muslims or other groups.
12. Iraq's leaders and the foreign governments involved must find ways to install the rule of law. Intolerance between social groups has grown markedly as an outcome of the conflict there. The rule of law must include re-establishment of a multi-cultural equilibrium in society.
13. On the other hand, a living Christian presence is a positive reminder that peace, pluralism and tolerance are things that work together for good, in Iraq and throughout the Middle East. The continuing presence of Christians in Iraq is a witness to the ethnic, cultural and religious diversity that are an essential part of the Middle East.
14. Like other Christians of the region, Iraqi Christians affirm that the future of Christianity does not lie in emigration but in peace. Their churches are some of the oldest in the world, but foundations laid in biblical times are being torn up in our day. As they strive to meet the present challenges and show great strength, they also look to churches overseas and especially in the West to do more to influence governments to find even-handed solutions for Iraq and for other crises in the region.
15. Credit is due to the leading Muslim clerics who are using their authority to contain the violence in Iraq despite the presence of factional, foreign and criminal armed forces. These leaders understand and acknowledge the fate of the churches. Multi-religious initiatives to resolve conflicts there and promote reconciliation also give cause for hope.
16. Joint Christian-Muslim advocacy overseas for tolerance and co-existence in Iraq would send a powerful signal to Iraqis of all faiths. It would also be an investment in the best interests of an increasingly polarized region.

Recommendations:

Whereas dangers and deprivations confronting the Iraqi people give cause for great concern, those suffering are not beyond the reach of God's plenteous mercy. Members of the body of Christ are called to reach out in similar spirit with acts of compassion, demonstrations of solidarity and embassies of peace. Accordingly, the Executive Committee of the World Council of Churches, meeting in Etchmiadzin, Armenia, 25-28 September 2007, calls the member churches of the WCC to take *direct actions*:

- A. Keeping the people and churches of Iraq in their prayers and providing increased assistance to them for church life and for service to a society in great need. Support can be channelled through ACT International, the Middle East Council of Churches, WCC-related specialized ministries and church families present in Iraq.
- B. Raising awareness in their parishes and in their countries concerning the general suffering of the Iraqi people including its Christian communities.
- C. Providing support to displaced people inside Iraq and to Iraqi refugees through ACT International, the Middle East Council of Churches and WCC-related specialized ministries.
- D. Demonstrating their solidarity with the Christian communities and people of Iraq. Church-only actions and joint initiatives with Muslims are both needed in order to show support for the people of Iraq and to make clear once again that policies of occupation do not have international church support.

Whereas the core problems of the Iraq crisis remain largely unresolved, namely, the failures to meet basic needs, ensure public security and provide essential infrastructure; the low levels of multilateral support for government institutions and civil society groups; the on-going presence of occupation forces; no balanced sharing of national resources; increased alienation between communities and loss of religious freedom; therefore the Executive Committee calls WCC member churches to *advocate with governments*:

- E. Contacting the governments whose forces occupy Iraq to remind them of their obligations to the people of Iraq under the Geneva Conventions and, at the same time, to remind these governments of the unconscionable losses of human life from more than four years of war in Iraq, condemning all causes of civilian casualties – from the as many as one million ‘excess deaths’ now documented by public health surveys, to the ‘collateral damage’ caused by military action, to the countless suicide attacks.
- F. Engaging their own governments over the need to break the international silence on the humanitarian crisis in Iraq and provide greater assistance to displaced and refugee Iraqis through organizations such as the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and the International Organization for Migration.
- G. Informing their governments of the fate of Iraq's Christian communities and the importance of protecting all minorities there to preserve the pluralistic, multi-faith character of Iraqi society.
- H. Raising with their governments the importance of having open debate and broad multilateral engagement in the implementation of UN Security Council Resolution 1770 and of agreeing further measures that assist the people of Iraq in building a viable, independent state.