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FOR ACTION

Report on Public Issues

In the 18 months since the last Central Committee meeting, the Executive Committee took public actions by statements and minutes on the United Nations Peacebuilding Commission, the need for churches' vigilance against nuclear proliferation, the situation in the Horn of Africa, the 10th anniversary of the Kyoto Protocol, Iraq and its Christian communities, Iran and the Middle East regional crisis, and Darfur.

The Officers and Executive Committee members decided to propose action on the following public issues to the Central Committee:

1. Minute on global warming and climate change
2. Statement on democratic electoral processes
3. Statement on the crisis in Kenya and the churches' response
4. Statement on Pakistan
5. Minute on the humanitarian situation in the Gaza Strip

The first two statements are copied in their entirety below. The statements on Kenya and Pakistan and the minute on Gaza will be forthcoming.

Minute on global warming and climate change

"We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present times" (Rom 8:22)

1. "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth...God saw all that he had made, and it was very good" (Genesis 1:1.31). From the first verses of the Bible the wholeness and sanctity of creation is affirmed. Life is created, sustained and made whole by the power of God's Holy Spirit (Genesis 1; Romans 8) and human beings are created out of the very dust of the earth (Genesis 2). Over against all this, human sin is an offence that breaks relationships with God, the rest of humankind and the created order (Genesis 3 and 4; Jeremiah 14, Hosea 4:1-3). Carrying the marks of human sin, "we know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present times" (Rom 8:22). These words of Saint Paul to the Romans have a new echo today when we look at the consequences of climate change.
2. Indigenous peoples all over the world have particularly witnessed a respectful way of relating with the environment. The sacred nature of the whole creation is also reflected in different indigenous worldviews. While looking at the impact of global warming and climate change, these approaches can provide inspiration and encouragement.
3. The effects of climate change are being experienced already in many regions of the world. One of particular significance is the water crisis. This includes the lack of access to safe drinking water and

sanitation for more than one billion people in the world. The water crisis also effects agricultural production, as in some places drastic changes in rainfall patterns have resulted in severe droughts and unprecedented floods. Other effects of climate change are hurricanes, cyclones and typhoons which are increasing in strength, causing loss of life and destruction of the environment and of property. Thus, human life and the whole of creation are suffering a new threat. Climate change raises ecological, social, economic, political and ethical issues, and demonstrates the brokenness of relationships between God, humankind and creation. Reflecting on these issues also implies a deepening of our understanding of the complex relationships between poverty, wealth and ecology. God wondrously and lovingly created a world with more than enough resources to sustain generations upon generations of human beings and other living creatures, but the mindless production and excessive consumption of individuals, corporations and countries has led to the continuous desecration of the creation, including global warming and other forms of climate change.

4. It has become clear, through scientific research over the past years and especially through the 2007 Report of the UN-sponsored Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), that human activity is a major cause of climate change. Human activities related to the use of fossil fuel and deforestation have, for instance, increased the levels of greenhouse gases (GHG) like carbon dioxide (CO₂) that tend to warm the atmosphere. Global GHG emissions due to human activities have increased by 70% between 1970 and 2004. Continued greenhouse gas emissions at or above current rates would cause further warming and induce many changes in the global climate system during the 21st century. As the IPCC 2007 Report states, the warming of the climate system is unequivocal.
5. Global warming is one of the most evident aspects of climate change and calls for an immediate and effective response. The average temperature of the earth is rising and some areas are particularly affected. A warming of about 0.6 °C has been recorded since the late 19th century. It has occurred in both the northern and southern hemispheres, and over the oceans. The ice sheets of Antarctica, the Arctic, Greenland, glaciers and mountainous regions are undergoing extraordinary rates of melting due to temperature increases. The vulnerability of the ice sheets to warming could be increased by dynamic processes related to ice flow, thereby raising the level of the sea even more. Global average sea level is projected to rise by 18 to 59 cm by the end of the 21st century and rising sea levels are already affecting some islands, particularly in the Pacific. This region, together with Africa and the Caribbean, will suffer the worst consequences of climate change.
6. As stated by the IPCC Report and other studies the situation needs urgent mitigation and adaptation measures in order to prevent further adverse consequences of rising temperatures. Mitigation (dealing with the causes) is a must for developed countries that will have to drastically reduce their CO₂ emissions. Adaptation (dealing with the impacts) is urgently needed by developing countries to be able to cope with the changes that are happening. Global warming will not effect all equally. Those who are and will be most effected are impoverished and vulnerable communities, mostly in the global South. Effects of deforestation in rainforest regions of Africa, Asia and Latin America, the rise of the sea level in the Pacific, for instance, have had an impact in poor communities who are much more dependent on natural resources for their subsistence and do not have the means to adapt to the changes.
7. To address the threats the world is facing because of climate change, action must be taken now. In December 2007, at the Conference of Parties to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) in Bali, governments, agreed on a road map for the negotiation of a new set of commitments under the UNFCCC and the Kyoto Protocol for the post-2012 period. Negotiations are to be concluded by the end of 2009. During the time of the Conference, the world welcomed the ratification of the Protocol by Australia, leaving the United States as the sole major emitter who has not ratified it. The response at the governmental level should be combined with actions

taken by individuals, groups, communities, the business sector and others in society to tackle the menaces of climate change. In fact if there is not a profound change in life styles, development patterns and the pursuit of economic growth, humanity will not be able to meet the challenge. As the WCC delegation in Bali clearly stressed, a change of paradigm is needed, "It is our conviction as members of faith communities that a Change of Paradigm from one way of thinking to another is needed if we are to adequately respond to the challenge of climate change".

8. Climate change is both an environmental issue and a matter of justice. Major GHG emitters have a historic responsibility to assume, to stop and to reverse the current trend. Developing countries, while looking for better conditions for their people, face a dilemma which should be confronted looking for ways not to repeat the path that led to the present situation. The current unsustainable production and consumption patterns have caused tremendous negative effects in the environment and generated an ecological debt towards humanity and the earth. This ecological debt should be analyzed in relation to the financial debt. To reverse this trend it becomes crucial to look for technologies and practices both to mitigate and adapt, especially responding to the needs of vulnerable communities.
9. Churches and religious communities can take key leadership roles in addressing global warming and climate change concerns to individuals, communities and governments. In the Christian understanding, our responses will follow the call to change, to convert and to repent (*metanoia*) that the Gospel proclaims (Mark 1:15). Moreover the call to, "Act fast and act now!", made to government representatives in Bali by the WCC, should be backed up by the witness and continuous reflection of the churches and Christian organizations. In the context of climate change and global warming, the reminder of Saint Paul that, "the creation waits in eager expectation for the children of God to be revealed" (Romans 8:19), highlights that the response to these challenges comes from the core of our faith.
10. Churches and their congregations and communities, should experience a new way of living, recapturing the spirit of responsible sharing of the first Christian communities as the book of Acts recalls (Acts 2:42-47). The question we must pose is whether we can rise together to meet this unprecedented opportunity. Churches, for example, should be able to find ways to challenge and motivate each other to measure our ecological and economic "footprints" and to follow through by making lasting changes in lifestyles and economic pursuits. Church members have to take responsibility for paying their share of the ecological debt that looms large in the years ahead. Churches must find the courage to model new ways of living as disciples of the One who came so that all people may have life. Christians should practice "life in all its fullness" in the face of a modern materialism that has now been globalized. Steps such as these will be a testimony which could permeate societies and be a catalyst for much-needed change.
11. WCC member churches actions with regards to climate change should also be seen in relationship with the Decade to Overcome Violence and the lead-up to the International Ecumenical Peace Convocation. The theme of the Convocation, "Glory to God and Peace on Earth", highlights peace on earth, which should include peace with the earth as well as peace among human beings. Many churches, ecumenical organizations and specialized ministries have already started to take action concerning climate change and global warming in what can be considered signs of the times. With different initiatives, the Ecumenical Patriarch has played a leadership role advocating for the care of creation, involving the scientific community, including its concerns in education curricula and calling, on 1 September 1989, to observe September 1st (the beginning of the liturgical year in the Orthodox Church) as creation day. This call has recently been reiterated by the Third European Ecumenical Assembly, meeting in Romania in September 2007, who recommended dedicating a special season of the year to creation, beginning with September 1st. Pacific church leaders in their meeting in July 2007, stressed, "the increased devastating effects of climate change that threaten the lives of our people in the Pacific island countries, such as, Kiribati, Tuvalu and the Marshall Islands", and proposed sending an ecumenical pastoral team to visit the member

churches in Kiribati and Tuvalu as an expression of the global ecumenical solidarity. Forty years after the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. in January 2008, the New Baptist Covenant Celebration in the United States recognized the importance of environmental stewardship. And also forty years after the WCC Uppsala Assembly, the Church of Sweden is organizing in Uppsala an inter-religious summit on climate change in November 2008.

Having listened to WCC member churches, and taking into account previous WCC policies related to climate change and global warming, in particular the recent Executive Committee statement on the 10th Anniversary of the Kyoto Protocol, September 2007, the Central Committee of the World Council of Churches, meeting in Geneva, Switzerland, 13 - 20 February 2008:

- A. ***Urgently calls*** the churches to strengthen their prophetic ministry in relationship to global warming and climate change, recalling its adverse effects on poor and vulnerable communities in various parts of the world, and encourages the churches to reinforce their call to governments, NGOs, the scientific community and the business sector to continue intensifying cooperation in relation to global warming and climate change;
- B. ***Recognizes*** that a profound change in the relationship towards nature, economic policies, consumption, production and technological patterns is needed to adequately respond to the threats of global warming and climate change;
- C. ***Acknowledges*** that a call for such change made by the churches should be based on the commitment of Christian communities to take up a different way of living;
- D. ***Proclaims*** that such a commitment should be seen as an intrinsic component of the message of the Good News, promoting creative and long standing responses to the challenges;
- E. ***Encourages*** member churches, specialized ministries and other ecumenical partners to:
 - a. develop and share creative ways of practicing ecologically respectful relationships within the human community and with the earth,
 - b. work toward building worldwide solidarity for the adoption of sustainable lifestyles, and
 - c. monitor the ecological footprints of individuals, parishes, corporations and states to help guide these and other steps to mitigate climate change and global warming;
- F. ***Supports*** the initiatives worked out by various churches to address global warming and climate change and ***invites*** churches to look for ways of sharing resources related to other initiatives;
- G. ***Calls*** member churches to observe through prayers and action a special time for creation, its care and stewardship, starting on September 1st;
- H. ***Asks*** churches to accompany the people and communities of the Pacific most at risk from climate change, especially in Kiribati and Tuvalu, and to find meaningful ways to show solidarity with them;
- I. ***Requests*** theological schools, seminaries and academies to deepen the ethical and theological dimensions of the causes of global warming and climate change and of the sustainable lifestyle that is needed as a response;
- J. ***Promotes*** the exploration of inter-religious avenues for cooperation and constructive response, such as the inter-religious summit planned by the Church of Sweden, ensuring a better stewardship of creation and a common witness through concrete actions;
- K. ***Encourages*** churches to continue their national advocacy for action on climate change.

Statement on democratic electoral processes

The words of the Apostle Paul to the Galatians and also of Deuteronomy are appropriate to reflect upon as we look at the situations of the electoral processes in several parts of the world today and over the last few years.

“You are all children of God through faith in Christ Jesus, for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.” (Galatians 3:26-28)

“Choose for each of your tribes individuals who are wise, discerning, and reputable to be your leaders.” (Deuteronomy 1:13)

1. These beliefs are also at the heart of the Universal Declaration on Human Rights. Furthermore, the United Nations Millennium Declaration commits the nations of the world, “to promote democracy and strengthen the rule of law, as well as respect for all internationally recognized human rights and fundamental freedoms, including the right to development”. In it, world leaders commit, “to work collectively for more inclusive political processes, allowing genuine participation by all citizens in all our countries”.
2. As we celebrate the 60th Anniversary of this important document, adopted on 10 December 1948, we would do well to recall this text as we participate in the electoral processes of our nations.
3. It is well to call upon these words as we look at recent events in Kenya, Georgia, Ukraine and Pakistan. Also as we look back at the turmoil caused to some citizens by the irregularities in the elections of the United States and as we look forward to the forthcoming elections in Zimbabwe, Angola and other parts of the world. This shows that a critical look at electoral processes as an integral part of democratic governance is needed. This should be done taking into account as well power relationships at different levels. How we are to discern the role of the church in these situations is also an issue to be considered.
4. During the last century one trend that has shaped the world, is the rise of democracy. Presently, a considerable number of all countries practice democracy in one form or the other. Democracy is the source of political legitimization. In recent times, civil societies in many countries have become the engine of social change and democratization. Civil society, including non governmental organizations and churches dedicated to issues of human rights and good governance are often seen as a leading force of democratization. Though democracy has in many ways opened up the space for politics and brought liberty to the people, in many cases it has been misused and manipulated in such a way that it has actually negated the rule of law and made corruption worse in many countries. Democratic principles and values have to be cultivated and nurtured over a period of time before they can bear fruit, particularly in countries where the rate of literacy is low.
5. Elections serve as a way for people to choose their representatives and future government and are the means for conferring legitimacy on the political system. In order to make sure that the election outcome truly reflects the will of the people, a well structured pre- and post-electoral mechanism should be put into place. In other words, electoral monitoring during election day does not suffice. History shows that most acts that put a serious compromise on the electoral outcome occur both during the preparation period preceding the elections and sometimes after (in cases where there is a dispute over the result and a recount), and as a result of: dubious election laws and regulations, manipulation of voter registration and of voting machines, government controlled media resulting in biased media exposure of candidates, manipulation on the part of opposition parties, etc. Thus, there should be due consideration of all these elements in order to assure an effective monitoring of the electoral processes which can contribute to the establishment of democratically elected governments.

6. Furthermore, a democratically elected government does not always necessarily guarantee the fulfilment of people's aspirations. In some countries, though elections have taken place in accordance with national and international standards, interferences by outside factors have seriously effected the election's outcome. Democracy can not flourish in a context of fear and in an environment which is deprived of the basic institutions and infrastructures necessary for sustaining a democratically elected government. Special attention has to be given to the establishment of effective public institutions, including: an independent judiciary, an impartial and incorruptible police force, accountable legislature and public service. Unless there is a system which can guarantee transparency, accountability and respect for the rule of law, democratically elected governments run the risk of falling short of their goal. The international community, and especially the big powers, must assume their responsibility in offering all necessary support to countries in need of such democratic reforms. They must encourage and assist them in their struggle to consolidate democracy and avoid any inopportune interference. The obligations of the international community should not merely be limited to electoral monitoring, which is indisputably important but does not suffice. The fundamental values of shared responsibility and solidarity should guide them in their efforts to support countries in their quest of the establishment of a truly participatory democracy.
7. Recognizing the importance of elections and the democratic process, the World Council of Churches, through ecumenical election monitoring teams has accompanied churches and Christians in several countries to ensure fairness of the electoral process.
8. In the Central Committee background document, Contemporary Challenges to Africa, 20-28 January 1994, it was stated that, "...elections alone do not constitute democracy. A precondition for lasting democracy is a minimum of social and economic justice for every citizen. The formal 'democratization' of the political life of a nation is insufficient either to obtain or to sustain democracy. External pressures and 'conditionalities' have led some autocratic regimes to don the cloak of Western-style democracy, but the results have seldom been more than cosmetic. True participatory democracy – government of, by and for the people, as the Preamble to the Constitution of the United States of America puts it – requires fundamental institutional change, authentic respect for individual and collective rights and freedoms, including economic rights. Political and economic participation must go hand in hand."
9. Democracy and political governance are closely interrelated with socio-economic development and play a vital role in its advancement. Social inequalities rupture social cohesion and challenge democratic governance. Extreme poverty and exclusion pose a major threat to basic human rights, prevent a considerable number of citizens who find themselves in socially challenging situations from participating in the democratic process and eventually result in fragmented societies. The issue of establishing and guaranteeing the respect and full enjoyment of human rights, as well as the realization of free and fair elections, constitute indispensable conditions of a truly democratic governance.
10. Encouraging and advancing greater participation of citizens and civil society institutions in public governance is a meaningful way of working towards the establishment of a genuinely participatory democracy. Policy-making should engage a wide spectrum of civil society institutions.
11. Within this context, democratic assessments, should be promoted. These assessments can lead to the identification of the causes of democratic deficits. They can also provide valuable information, which in turn can enable civil society to engage in public debate about the objectives of democratization and the key obstacles to their achievement. Such monitoring of state reform and advocacy for citizen priorities is critical to the creation of accountable, effective and truly democratic governments.
12. The WCC Cyprus Consultation of 1981 gave the following definition of political ethics, "*An ecumenical political ethic has to do with the evaluation of the understanding and exercise of power in faithfulness to*

the gospel for the sake of social justice, human dignity and authentic community". It went on to affirm that the integrity and dignity of politics should be respected, maintained and, where undermined, restored. At the same time, it called for persons in political life to be reminded of their proper tasks and responsibilities.

13. In all regions around the world we have seen reports of electoral irregularities, charges of corruption, intimidation and fraud. As people of faith, the WCC believes that true democracy must stand above the negative politics that may thwart the electoral rights of individuals and that legal procedures must be put in place to assure these rights. True democratic governments should be based on collaboration of the various peoples within that society - regardless of race, ethnic background, economic status, different abilities or religion.
14. All actors, churches included, should assume their responsibility for peace, justice, reconciliation, unity and reconstruction of the society, for democracy as a system of just and fair governance guaranteeing the realization of democratic elections to become a reality in the lives of our people.

Mindful of the fact that the establishment of full democracy and respect for the human rights of both majority and minority communities depends on the will of all to live together in a spirit of tolerance, mutual respect and peaceful co-existence, the Central Committee of the World Council of Churches, meeting in Geneva, Switzerland, 13 - 20 February 2008:

- A. **Urges** countries to work for the advancement and consolidation of democracy by guaranteeing the protection of all human rights and fundamental freedoms; by establishing effective public institutions, including an independent judiciary, accountable legislature and public service; by setting forth an electoral system that provides for the free and fair expression of the people's will;
- B. **Appreciates and supports** the work already done by the UN organizations and non-governmental institutions that have provided various forms of electoral assistance in numerous countries; voter education programmes, technical assistance and information concerning the conduct of elections, electoral monitoring and observation;
- C. **Requests** the United Nations, and all other Regional and International Institutions to be on the alert and to continue to provide all the necessary assistance in order to ensure the realization of fully participatory elections and democratically established governments;
- D. **Urges** the UN system organizations to keep up the support of a broader citizen participation in governance by providing technical and advisory services and other forms of assistance; by promoting information sharing and dissemination of good practices; and by fostering partnerships with the civil society organization;
- E. **Encourages** churches to be actively involved in civic education; education for democracy and voter education through awareness building programs of voters, as well as to monitor and follow up the election processes.