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ADOPTED

Report of the Public Issues Committee

The central committee **approved** the following statements and minutes proposed by the public issues committee:

1. Statement on democratic electoral processes (*cf. page 2*)
2. Statement on the crisis in Kenya and the churches' response (*cf. page 5*)
3. Statement on the crisis in Pakistan (*cf. page 8*)
4. Statement on cluster munitions (*cf. page 10*)
5. Minute on global warming and climate change (*cf. page 12*)
6. Minute on the humanitarian situation in the Gaza Strip (*cf. page 15*)
7. Minute on our religious imperative to foster sensitivity and reconciliation in shifting society (*cf. page 18*)

The central committee **resolved** to

- a) refer the proposed "**statement on eco-justice and ecological debt**" to the churches for reflection. The central committee requests the churches to respond to the proposed "statement" prior to the next central committee meeting so that a revised text can be considered for adoption. It is further suggested that a hearing on this topic be scheduled for the central committee. (*cf. page 20*)
- b) mandate the general secretary, in light of recent developments in **Kosovo**, to send a letter of support to the Holy Synod of Bishops of the Serbian Orthodox Church, on behalf of this central committee, following the appeal of the Holy Synod to the clergy, monastics and faithful of the Serbian Church for commitment to steadfastness and peaceful co-existence in Kosovo, and supporting the Holy Synod's repeated request for the relevant international and local authorities to maintain equitable peace and accord in Kosovo.

Statement on democratic electoral processes

“The earth is the Lord’s and all that is in it; the world, and those who live in it” (Psalm 24:1)
“Choose for each of your tribes individuals who are wise, discerning and reputable to be your leaders”
(Deuteronomy 1:13)

1. Although the Bible offers no description of the definitive political system, it indicates that every system has both the potential for participation, and for the abuse of power. For Christians, the Hebrew prophetic traditions - as well as the Christian tradition - offer the reminder that people of faith must embrace the responsibility to be engaged in the civil political systems of which they are a part, but that they must also embrace the responsibility to advocate for justice, compassion and morality when those in authority abuse their power.
2. Christians faithfully function within many different political systems and are often called upon to play influential roles within those systems. In so doing, they fulfil their calling to be salt and light which both seasons and enlightens any system in which they have been placed.
3. One of the most significant developments in recent history is the increased use of democratic electoral processes. 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”. In it, world leaders commit “to work collectively for more inclusive political processes, allowing genuine participation by all citizens”. Upon the occasion of the 60th Anniversary of the UN “Universal Declaration of Human Rights”, adopted on 10 December 1948, it is important to recall this text in light of recent electoral processes in Kenya, Georgia, the Ukraine and Pakistan; and in anticipation of elections in Zimbabwe, Angola, Russia, Armenia, Italy, the United States and Fiji.
4. A critical look at electoral processes as a part of democratic governance is needed in order to safeguard a just, participatory and moral framework for the exercise of power in democratic systems. Though democracy has led to a greater degree of liberty and participation for individuals in their political systems, in some cases it has been misused in such a way that it has negated the rule of law, exacerbated corruption, and offered a political legitimization for the abuse of human rights. In addition, there is a growing tendency for certain economic, bureaucratic and media elites to exercise significant power without sufficient accountability to democratically elected authorities. It is the responsibility of the church to call attention to these abuses of power.
5. In democratic systems, elections serve as a way for people to confer legitimacy on a participatory democratic political system. In order to ensure that an election truly reflects the will of the people, attention should be paid to pre- and post- electoral mechanisms. Electoral monitoring on election days does not suffice. A number of recent situations reveal that serious compromises to electoral outcomes can occur, both during the preparation period preceding the elections and after the elections (for example, in cases where there is a dispute over the result and a recount). In addition, dubious election laws, limitations to the full participation of minority and economically disadvantaged candidates and parties, manipulation of voter registration processes and voting machines, biased media coverage of candidates, and manipulation on the part of opposition parties can affect outcomes. Effective monitoring of electoral processes should seek to analyze these factors, and to address any perceived manipulations in order to ensure the legitimacy of democratically elected governments.
6. In spite of these safeguards, it must be acknowledged that a democratically elected government does not guarantee the fulfilment of citizens’ aspirations. Democracy cannot flourish in a context of

fear, nor in a situation lacking the institutions necessary for sustaining a democratically elected government.¹ Effective public institutions, including an independent judiciary, an impartial police force, an accountable legislature, a responsible and effective public service, and a process for democratic evaluation and reform are necessary. The obligations of the international community are not limited to electoral monitoring, but rather to the encouragement of all of the necessary frameworks for the establishment of a truly participatory democracy.

7. Democratic assessments offer an important tool for the identification of democratic deficits. They can also provide valuable information, which can enable civil society to engage in public debate about the objectives of democratization and the needed reforms in any democratic system. Such assessments can help to establish and sustain accountable, effective and participatory democratic governments, which minimize potential abuses of power.
8. In addition, it must be acknowledged that - as in every political system - poverty and exclusion pose a major threat to full participation in the political life of a community, and to the proper functioning of society.
9. In recognition of the importance of legitimate electoral processes and democratic frameworks, the World Council of Churches, through its ecumenical electoral monitoring teams, has accompanied churches in several countries to ensure fairness and justice in electoral processes.
10. In all regions of the world we have seen evidence of the abuse of power, electoral irregularities, and examples of corruption, intimidation and electoral fraud. We believe that, in situations where people and societies have established democratic systems, that their governments should be based on the collaboration and participation of all citizens - regardless of race, ethnic background, economic status, different abilities, gender or religion.

Therefore, the central committee of the World Council of Churches, meeting in Geneva, Switzerland, 13-20 February 2008:

- A. ***Urges*** all countries to protect human rights and fundamental freedoms through the establishment of independent judiciaries, impartial police forces, accountable legislatures, and responsible public services;
- B. ***Encourages*** democratic countries to constantly monitor the electoral processes through which people can freely and fairly express their political will, and to establish necessary processes for democratic evaluation and reform;
- C. ***Commends*** the work of the UN and non-governmental institutions in various countries, that have provided electoral assistance and assessment, including voter education programmes, technical assistance and information concerning the conduct of elections, electoral monitoring and observation;
- D. ***Requests*** the UN and other regional and international institutions to continue to provide all necessary assistance in order to ensure the realization of just and participatory elections in democratically established states;
- E. ***Appeals*** to churches to be actively involved, where appropriate, in civil political engagement and education through awareness-building programmes for voters, and to participate in the monitoring

¹ See the central committee background document Contemporary Challenges to Africa, January 1994, which stated, "elections alone do not constitute democracy... True participatory democracy... requires fundamental institutional change, authentic respect for individual and collective rights and freedoms, including economic rights".

and assessment of electoral processes in order to ensure fair, just and participatory democratic elections.

APPROVED.

Statement on the crisis in Kenya and the churches' response

*"You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind."
This is the greatest and first commandment. And a second is like it: "You shall love your neighbour as yourself."
On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets. (Matthew 22:36-40)*

1. Kenya and its many communities are going through an extremely painful experience following heavily contested elections. Hundreds of people have been killed and thousands more have been wounded or maimed. Hundreds of thousands of citizens have been forced to flee from their homes. In the shadows of chaos, unknown numbers of women and girls have been subjected to sexual violence. People living with HIV and AIDS have been cut off from medical care. Uncounted homes and businesses have been looted and burned and many livelihoods destroyed.
2. Kenya's presidential elections of 27 December 2007 were followed by accusations and counter-accusations between the main opposition party and the ruling party about whether the ballot had been manipulated or sabotaged. The violence that followed shook a country that only weeks earlier was admired for a robust electoral contest and, five years ago, became a model for peaceful democratic change in Africa when its people insisted on the implementation of a multi-party political system.
3. Churches around the world have followed these events with concern and sorrow, with soul searching and prayer, with gifts of assistance and actions of solidarity, including the mediation efforts of the National Council of Churches of Kenya (NCC Kenya), Kenya's Inter-Religious Forum, the All Africa Conference of Churches (AACC) and the "Living Letters" delegation of the World Council of Churches in January 2008.
4. Signs of a turning-back from confrontation and violence now give cause for cautious hope. Standing as Kenya's neighbours in a global village, we thank God for the many peace-making efforts by churches and join with the sentiments expressed by the AACC: Speaking in the darkest hour of crisis, the Nairobi-based council called Kenya "the steward of Africa's collective hope" and said their host nation's "joys have become our joys and therefore its pains...The theology of the body of Christ urges us to be available for one another, not only for those who share at the common sacramental table, but for the world for which Christ died".
5. The disastrous aftermath of the elections should be understood within the broader social and historical context of Kenya. The root causes of the kind of violence that has raged for weeks can be traced to pre-independence and post-colonial political dispensations. The constitution crafted at the dawn of independence in 1963 should have been understood as a transitional instrument. It did not deal sufficiently with critical issues such as land ownership and a bill of rights. Subsequent constitutional changes gave mixed signals or were inadequate: making Kenya a *de jure* single party state in 1982, reverting to multi-party democracy in 1991 and making a spirited but inconclusive attempt to write a new constitution prior to the recent elections. Another much-needed measure - electoral reform, including a truly independent electoral commission - is still pending, now at great cost.
6. The current constitution and certain government institutions appear to have been misused to meet partisan political interests rather than the interests and aspirations of ordinary Kenyans. A presidency that is predicated upon the politics of patronage, without institutionalized power-sharing, hardly inspires people's confidence that the public interest will be met. The perceived pattern is that gaining public office benefits the winner's community more than others in the constituency. The difficulty of gaining a seat or a tendency to hold onto power year after year only

strengthens the popular conviction that this form of democracy is defective and must be repaired. Unless it is repaired, future presidential elections may be just as intractable as this one and potentially as dangerous to the nation. This need to build public trust in government is not unique to Kenya.

7. While the current conflict is a consequence of disputed presidential elections, the communities in conflict have long-standing and often unvoiced concerns dating back to independence, when many Kenyans felt that their communal expectations were not met. The independent government inherited colonial structures and then failed to address certain injustices and inequalities that divided the nation. Issues that affected many communities and various ethnic groups went unresolved. A negative colonial legacy grew into a post-colonial political problem. External factors also continued in new ways and old, influencing the political culture, shaping expectations of a growing population and driving key sectors of the national economy.
8. Churches of the WCC gave early notice of such trends in Africa in a statement on **Unity and Human Rights in Africa Today** by the WCC central committee in 1971, “The interference of rich and powerful foreign nations offers the most serious threat to the stability and development of African nations, and makes the solution of the existing problems of tribalism and internal dissidence more difficult”. These political, social and economic forces, the committee said, “menace the aspirations of the African peoples for unity and for a human existence in full dignity and independence”.

Sobered by the reality of inter-communal violence, seized of the need for churches to discern their role in times of deep crisis, and convinced of the capacity for societies to allocate power with accountability, the central committee of the World Council of Churches, meeting in Geneva, Switzerland, 13–20 February 2008:

- A. **Recognizes** that churches were among those implicated in the crisis and, as the NCC Kenya has stated, were “unable to effectively confront these issues” because of partisanship;
- B. **Affirms** church leaders and members who became advocates for peace and unity during Kenya’s electoral crisis, and commends the same role to churches in comparable crises elsewhere;
- C. **Urges** that churches in countries facing related crises learn with the churches of Kenya about the need, for example, to issue joint calls to end violence, to do so as promptly as possible, to speak out consistently for the protection of human life, and to demonstrate the Christian commitment to peace by taking an active part in on-going processes of mediation, reconciliation and healing between the parties in conflict;
- D. **Recommends** that, when societies become deeply divided and where it is possible, member churches and councils of churches support platforms for dialogue among government, opposition and civil society leaders where they may hear alternative views, debate differences, agree to negotiate, and take steps to prevent, reduce and stop violence;
- E. **Encourages** churches to initiate and participate in efforts to build up interfaith collaboration and advocacy for peace and reconciliation, noting the work of the Inter-Religious Forum in Kenya;
- F. **Affirms** the need for church members and leaders to promote a culture of dialogue - in church, between churches and in society - where diverse groups are made welcome, where differences are addressed and where, as far as conscience permits, partisan political alignments are avoided and the common good prevails; **further affirming** the hope that relationships between churches may be bridges across divided communities and a safety net in times of crisis;

- G. **Encourages** churches to be actively involved in programmes of civic education and education for democracy, human rights and the dignity and equality of women and men, and to take part in programmes to monitor and follow-up electoral processes;
- H. **Applauds** the wider African and international community engagement in mediation and conflict resolution efforts, such as the work of the African Union and the counsel offered by distinguished African leaders; and **encourages** the provision of humanitarian assistance to people who are displaced or returning home, especially through Action by Churches Together.

APPROVED.

Statement on the crisis in Pakistan

1. The people of Pakistan are clamouring for political and social change. In spite of the fact that harassment and repression against people's movements have been intensified, we pray and hope that the people of Pakistan will be able to live in peace and harmony soon so that "they shall all sit under their own vines and under their own fig trees, and no one shall make them afraid" (Micah 4:4).
2. Pakistan is once again passing through an ordeal in its sixty years of independent history. The current crisis in Pakistan revolves around an array of serious problems: mounting violence; suicide attacks; bomb blasts; political repression; blatant violations of human rights; suppression of civil liberties; and the arrest and detention of lawyers, political activists, human rights activists, journalists, and trade unionists who stand for democracy and human rights. Resurgence of religious fundamentalism, the spreading of terror by extremists and cross-border terrorism are intensifying the unrest and ongoing turmoil in Pakistan.
3. Pakistan has been under the military dictatorship of President Pervez Musharraf since the then Prime Minister Nawas Sharief was ousted in October 1999. The current wave of political turmoil in the country started with the declaration of a state of emergency in November 2007 by President Musharraf. The situation is alarming as the nation faces an increase in suicide bombings and kidnappings affecting hundreds of civilians every week. The assassination of Benazir Bhutto on 27 December 2007, a leader who was committed to keeping the Federation of Pakistan together and stood against the military dictatorship, extremism and terrorism, deepened the crisis facing the country.
4. Rule of law is absent in the country. The legal justice system is paralyzed due to the lack of independence of the judiciary and dismissal of the chief justice and other judges. The country-wide judicial crisis has caused a major setback and paralysis of governance, which has in turn affected all areas of life. Arbitrary arrests, detentions and ill-treatment of lawyers; keeping judges and lawyers in continuous detention; and the use of force against protesting lawyers exemplify the fact that the present government has not been committed to resolving the judicial crisis. People's movements calling for reforms, especially the courageous movement of Pakistani lawyers and people, were able to overthrow the decision of the military ruler and restore the chief justice (who had been fired by the military ruler), achieving the upholding of constitutional values for a brief stint. However, the judiciary continues to remain vulnerable and powerless.
5. Even though President Musharraf opted out of his military position, his government continues to lose public support and legitimacy to remain in power. Despite his declining credibility and legitimacy to rule, the United States' administration continues its support of President Musharraf. Since 11 September 2001, the US military aid to Pakistan and the deepening US involvement in the country have been justified as part of the US "war on terror".
6. The Pakistani military has played an influential role in mainstream politics in Pakistan's history, with army generals ruling from 1958–1971, 1977–1988, and from 1999 onwards. The democratic process in Pakistan has been in peril while the army remains a central player in the politics. The outcome to date of the results of the elections held on 18 February is encouraging, and we very much hope this shows a return to democratic governance in Pakistan.
7. It is heartening that the churches and faith communities in Pakistan have come forward to respond to the deteriorating situation in the country and to condemn the violence, terrorism and all other forms of dehumanizing measures. We believe that human life is a gift of God and any action which

threatens life is contrary to the noble values to promote peace, love and forgiveness. All faith communities and civil society groups in Pakistan have a responsibility to their people to respond to the challenge posed by any forces that destroy God's gift of life.

The central committee of the World Council of Churches, meeting in Geneva from 13-20 February 2008, therefore:

- A. **Reiterates** the commitments of the churches to defend human rights, seek justice and promote peace;
- B. **Expresses its solidarity** with the suffering people of Pakistan, especially all those who are bereaved on the loss of their family members;
- C. **Expresses its deep concern** at the deteriorating situation which destroys peace and security and increases conflicts and violence in Pakistani society;
- D. **Expresses its condolences** to the Bhutto family and the people of Pakistan on the assassination of Mrs. Benazir Bhutto;
- E. **Welcomes** the election recently concluded in Pakistan and encourages the strengthening and developing of democratic processes in the country;
- F. **Urges** the government of Pakistan to order an independent and impartial inquiry into the circumstances of Mrs. Bhutto's death and to bring to justice all those responsible for the heinous crime;
- G. **Calls** for restoration of democracy, civil rights and rule of law in Pakistan, and urges the government of Pakistan to release all political prisoners and human rights activists;
- H. **Calls** on the incoming elected government of Pakistan to ensure the safety and security of all political leaders, human rights activists and minority religious communities in Pakistan;
- I. **Calls** on churches around the world to continue to pray for peace and reconciliation in Pakistan;
- J. **Affirms strongly** the interfaith initiatives by the Church of Pakistan to mobilize non-violent responses to acts of terrorism by building a culture of peace and interfaith harmony in the country;
- K. **Assures** the solidarity of the WCC to its member constituencies in Pakistan in their efforts to work on peace, reconciliation and communal harmony in the country.

APPROVED.

Statement on cluster munitions

“Do not be deceived; God is not mocked, for you reap whatever you sow.” (Gal. 6:7)

1. These words of wisdom from Scripture serve as a warning in a new context today. The verse sheds moral light on a modern weapon of war, an indiscriminate instrument that confounds the intentions of its users and brings terrible consequences to its victims. As Christians we live in the light of God’s promise that swords will be beaten into ploughshares, spears into pruning hooks, and that people shall not “learn war” any more (Isaiah 2:4). Within this broad mandate to overcome violence, the use of cluster munitions presents a particularly urgent challenge. Designed for the heat of battle, cluster munitions strike and strike when war is over; scattered in combat in an instant, cluster bombs reap a deadly harvest for decades; conceived to stop massed soldiers and tanks, these weapons mostly kill civilians one by one. We hear reports of a nun in Serbia who picked up bomblets scattered in a field and innocently brought them to her convent; of a Lebanese man who put his child in a tree for safety because of bomblets on the ground, only to have a bomblet in the tree kill the boy as the father went for help; of a Laotian mother who died in her garden from one of the millions of bomblets strewn across her country in a war before she was born.
2. Cluster munitions have been used in some 35 countries and regions since World War II including Iraq, Kuwait, Afghanistan, Chechnya, the former Yugoslavia, Angola, Cambodia and Vietnam. In the 2006 war in Israel and Lebanon, some four million cluster bomblets were dropped on southern Lebanon. The United Nations estimates that one million did not explode and that two-thirds of these are scattered in populated areas. Fully 98 percent of the casualties caused by cluster munitions are civilians.
3. A cluster munition is a weapon with multiple explosive submunitions which are dispensed from a container. The submunitions (bomblets) are scattered in order to kill and injure human beings over a wide area. They are designed to detonate in the air or on the ground, but large numbers fail to explode, leaving a deadly post-conflict legacy for local children, women and men.
4. About 75 countries possess cluster munitions. The submunitions in their stockpiles number in the billions, many old and unreliable. Until recently, governments had not taken concerted action to address either the prevalence of cluster munitions or the problems caused by their use. However, the massive and indiscriminate use of cluster munitions at the end of the war in southern Lebanon, after a ceasefire had been agreed, stirred worldwide concern. It served as a tragic catalyst for common action. International awareness of the need to deal with cluster munitions began to grow. More than 80 states and 250 non-governmental organizations have now joined a fast-track process to negotiate a treaty on cluster munitions during 2008. The proposed treaty would prohibit some or all cluster munitions, provide assistance to survivors, help affected communities and require clearance of contaminated land.
5. We believe that cluster munitions must be eliminated because their use causes indiscriminate civilian casualties. These wide-area weapons do not meet the two most important obligations of international humanitarian law to protect civilians during armed conflict: 1) the need to distinguish between civilians and combatants and 2) the need to avoid civilian losses that are out of proportion to direct military gains. Cluster munitions pose severe risks to civilian lives at the time of use and for decades afterward. They also have long-term impacts on peace operations, post-conflict rehabilitation and civilian livelihoods.
6. The calls for certain technical exemptions from a ban are not convincing: Self-destruct mechanisms reduce the number of unexploded bomblets but are still subject to failure themselves, especially

under field conditions. Lowering the rate of duds to even one percent still creates unacceptable levels of lethal and dangerous contamination in the targeted area. One percent of a million bomblets is 10,000 bomblets. Neither fix addresses the indiscriminate and disproportionate aspects of initial use. Technical solutions also do not remedy the humanitarian and moral problems inherent in cluster weapons use. What is required is a treaty that applies to all cluster munitions without exception.

Accordingly, and with a view to the so-called “Oslo Process” of negotiating a cluster munition treaty this year, the central committee of the World Council of Churches, meeting in Geneva, Switzerland, 13–20 February 2008:

- A. **Condemns** the use of cluster munitions;
- B. **Supports** the development of a legally binding international treaty to ban the use, production, stockpiling and transfer of cluster munitions, and to require assistance to survivors, help for affected communities and clearance of contaminated land;
- C. **Commends** the governments who have promoted and led the current Oslo Process on cluster munitions, including the governments of Norway, Peru, Austria, New Zealand and Ireland; and **urges** non-participating governments, including the United States, Russia, China, India, Israel and Pakistan, to join and support this timely multilateral arms control and humanitarian initiative;
- D. **Commends** the cluster munitions control work of the International Committee of the Red Cross and of civil society groups in the Cluster Munition Coalition, noting that the coalition includes various member churches of the WCC and church-related organizations;
- E. **Encourages** member churches of the WCC to become informed about the issue of cluster munitions and the current process to achieve a cluster munition treaty;
- F. **Recommends** that member churches join the international church concern for an effective cluster munition treaty and urge their governments to actively support the treaty process.

APPROVED.

“Be stewards of God’s creation!”

Minute on global warming and climate change

“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, NIV)

The present minute builds on previous statements of the WCC, especially the statement on the 10th anniversary of the Kyoto Protocol, adopted by the WCC executive committee in September 2007.

1. The scriptures affirm that the “earth is the Lord’s and everything in it” (Psalm 26:1, NIV). In Genesis 1:28, God charges humanity to care for the earth by giving humanity “dominion” over it. The word “dominion” is most appropriately translated as “stewardship”, since humanity is not the master of the earth but steward to responsibly care for the integrity of creation. 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 humanity is not always faithful in its stewardship. Mindless production and excessive consumption by individuals, corporations and countries have led to continuous desecration of creation, including global warming and other forms of climate change.
2. Indigenous peoples all over the world continue to live a respectful way of relating with the environment. The sacred nature of the whole creation is also reflected in different indigenous world-views. While looking at the impact of global warming and climate change, the indigenous peoples’ witness provides inspiration and encouragement.
3. Climate change, as the variation in the earth’s global climate or in regional climates over time, and its effects are being experienced already in many regions of the world. Global warming, i.e. the increase in the average temperature of the earth’s near-surface air and oceans, is one of the most evident aspects of climate change. The average temperature of the earth is rising. This creates the melting of ice sheets in Antarctica and Greenland, glaciers, permafrost in mountainous regions and the rising of the average sea level. Rising sea levels are already affecting some countries like Bangladesh in Asia and some islands, particularly in the Pacific. A water crisis brought on by severe droughts and unprecedented floods has resulted in a lack of access to safe drinking water and sanitation. 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 property. Further consequences of climate change are described in the 2007 “Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) Report”. 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.
4. 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 carbon dioxide (CO₂) emissions. Adaptation (dealing with the impacts) is urgently needed by developing countries to be able to cope with the changes that are happening. Those who are and will increasingly be affected are the impoverished and vulnerable communities of the global South who are much more dependant on natural resources for their subsistence and do not have the means to adapt to the changes. Deforestation in Africa, Asia and Latin America; the increase in vector-borne diseases (like dengue or malaria) in the higher altitude areas of Africa as a result of the increase in temperature; the forced migration, displacement and resettlement of populations as a result of sea level rise, particularly in the Pacific; are some of the impacts that will continue to increase the pressure on poor and vulnerable communities.

5. 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. The United States is now the sole major emitter who has not ratified the Kyoto Protocol. If there is no 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, “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”.
6. Climate change is both an environmental issue and a matter of justice. Major green house gas (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 in 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 what has been called an ecological debt towards humanity and the earth. This ecological debt can 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.
7. Churches and religious communities can take key leadership roles in addressing global warming and climate change concerns to individuals, communities and governments. The question we must pose is whether we can rise together to meet this unprecedented opportunity. Churches and religious communities, for example, must 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. Christians should practice “life in all its fullness” (John 10:10) 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.
8. As the effects of global warming can lead to conflict between populations competing over resulted scarce resources, 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, scheduled to take place in 2011. 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.
9. Many churches, ecumenical organizations and specialized ministries have already started to take action concerning climate change and global warming. 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 was reiterated by the Third European Ecumenical Assembly, meeting in Romania in September 2007. Also in September 2007, the 9th assembly of the Pacific Conference of Churches called on the churches in the Pacific to advocate for “a regional immigration policy giving citizens of countries most affected by climate change (...) rights to resettlement in other Pacific island nations”, and on the global ecumenical family to support this initiative. 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.

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 moral stand 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 advocacy towards governments, NGOs, the scientific community and the business sector to intensify cooperation in response to global warming and climate change;
- B. ***Calls for*** a profound change in the relationship towards nature, economic policies, consumption, production and technological patterns. This change is based on the commitment of Christian communities and institutions, including the WCC, which should strengthen the work of the Ecumenical Centre Ecology Group to continue implementing ecological practices in the Ecumenical Centre in Geneva;
- C. ***Encourages*** member churches, specialized ministries and other ecumenical partners to:
 - a. share and further develop creative ways of practicing ecologically respectful relationships within the human community and with the earth;
 - b. share knowledge and affordable technology that promote environmentally friendly lifestyles;
 - c. monitor the ecological footprints of individuals, parishes, corporations and states and take other steps to mitigate climate change and global warming;
- D. ***Urges*** member churches to observe through prayers and action a special time for creation, its care and stewardship, starting on September 1st every year, to advocate for the plight of people and communities of the Pacific, especially in the low lying atolls of Kiribati and Tuvalu, and to find specific ways to show our ecumenical solidarity with those most at risk;
- E. ***Requests*** theological schools, seminaries and academies to teach stewardship of all creation in order to deepen the ethical and theological understanding of the causes of global warming and climate change and of the sustainable lifestyle that is needed as a response;
- F. ***Promotes*** the exploration of inter-religious and inter-cultural 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.

APPROVED.

Minute on the humanitarian situation in the Gaza Strip

1. In an alarming appeal regarding the plight of the people of Gaza, the Heads of Churches in Jerusalem on 22 January 2008 warned that, “one and a half million people are imprisoned and without proper food or medicine; 800,000 without electricity supply. This is illegal collective punishment, an immoral act in violation of international law. This cannot be tolerated any further. The siege over Gaza should end now”.
2. The humanitarian, human rights and political situation of the people of Gaza has been grave for years and is steadily worsening. The logic of policies imposed upon this tiny strip of territory is being pushed to new extremes. Public order is further threatened by pressures from within. The horizon for those who live in one of the most densely populated places on earth seems to shrink by the day.
3. In addition to the humanitarian needs noted above by the churches in Jerusalem, United Nations, non-governmental and church-related organizations working in the Gaza Strip report that more Gazans than ever – 80 percent of households - live below the poverty line and need food and direct assistance; that fuel shortages are crippling essential services including sanitation and water supplies; that life-saving treatments are not available in local hospitals; that baby milk and cooking oil are scarce; that many public facilities have been destroyed by military attacks and that schools lack basic educational materials; that hundreds of businesses have gone bankrupt, half of the workforce is jobless and the economy is in collapse. While there is a need to move from meagre humanitarian aid to serious developmental assistance, some agencies have referred to the help allowed in from the outside world as a “drip-feed” of humanitarian aid.
4. Human rights violations exacerbate the humanitarian situation and have escalated with recent escalations in violence. “The right to life is imperilled for all in the region,” UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Louise Arbour, reported to a special session of the Human Rights Council last month. She noted that armed violations of the laws of war had killed seven civilians in nearby Israel last year where two towns are subjected to indiscriminate rocket attacks by militants in Gaza. She also reported that 131 Palestinian civilians were killed last year in attacks by Israeli forces on Gaza in targeted killings and in the use of disproportionate force.
5. Commissioner Arbour said that Palestinians generally, and especially the residents of Gaza, “are systematically deprived of the enjoyment of almost all their human rights and basic needs”. The movement of people, goods and services to and from Gaza is greatly restricted, especially along the border with Israel. Assessing the right to food, the World Food Programme reports that basic food imports are only half what is required. Regarding the right to health, the World Health Organization reports that the blockade’s impact seriously compromises health services and related infrastructure. The rights of work, education and adequate housing are also at risk.
6. All the authorities directly involved, the *de facto* Hamas authority and the Palestinian authority - to the extent that they exercise control - as well as the government of Israel, have primary obligations to protect the population of Gaza under international human rights and humanitarian law. Other governments are indirectly involved, such as European Union members paying for the reduced ration of fuel.
7. Rather than accept the isolation and punishment of Gaza, it is in the interests of all parties involved to work out the political reintegration of Gaza with the rest of the occupied Palestinian territory. Any credible peace process must allow for reconciliation between Palestinian parties and involve all the elected representatives of the Palestinian people. Meanwhile, the launching of

rockets, suicide bombings, the targeting of civilians, as well as the collective punishment of Gaza, and other actions such as settlements, road blocks, indefinite detentions and killings without trial, do not and will not make for peace.

8. Accordingly, as the World Council of Churches we express our deep sadness at the humanitarian situation in Gaza, increasing alarm at the incessant violations of human rights and on-going losses of life among Palestinians and Israelis, and grave concerns at the future of the peace process for both Israel and Palestine. A chorus of international concern is calling for an end to the blockade of Gaza and reminding the government of Israel that collective punishment is prohibited by the Geneva Convention that governs its conduct in Gaza. We join our voices to these calls for mercy and justice, again. We do so today and for as long as the suffering continues, believing that a future for all can and will be found.
9. The Amman conference was called to spur us to work for peace, because people living under and with endemic injustice still yearn for a just peace despite 60 years of conflict and despair. The “Amman Call” commits us with the churches of the Holy Land in the Middle East to “act and pray and speak and work and risk reputations and lives to build with them bridges for an enduring peace among the peoples of this tortured and beautiful place”.

The central committee of the World Council of Churches, meeting in Geneva, Switzerland, 13–20 February 2008:

- A. ***Calls urgently***, with the churches of the Holy Land, and with the Middle East Council of Churches, for an immediate lifting of the blockade of Gaza;
- B. ***Requests*** member churches to continue to remind the government of Israel of the need to fulfil its international obligations as an occupying power, under the Geneva Conventions, to guarantee the provision of food, medicine, fuel and water supplies and essential services, such as electricity and sanitation, to the Gaza Strip;
- C. ***Recognizes*** that civilians are being attacked and killed in both Israel and the occupied Palestinian territories and reiterates its absolute condemnation of attacks on civilians;
- D. ***Charges*** member churches to watch that all authorities exercising control and governmental functions in and over Gaza respect international human rights law and international humanitarian law and encourage them to fulfil its requirements;
- E. ***Calls*** member churches to speak out for the people of Gaza, in public and with their governments, calling for an end to the siege, an end to the collective punishments and a negotiated ceasefire;
- F. ***Commends*** churches and church-related organizations working to stop third-party governments, such as the European Union and the United States, from providing financial assistance to the occupying power for actions concerning Gaza that are wrongful and illegal under international law; and further ***recommends*** that other churches take up such entreaties to governments involved;
- G. ***Calls*** the fellowship of churches in the WCC to pray for an end of the suffering in Gaza and progress toward a just and lasting peace between Palestinians and Israelis;
- H. ***Invites*** member churches of the WCC to receive and affirm the “Amman Call” of June 2007 that launched the Palestine Israel Ecumenical Forum and to come together in advocacy for peace under the forum, including the Ecumenical Accompaniment Programme in Palestine and Israel,

debating theological positions related to the conflict, and a global week of International Church Action for Peace in Palestine and Israel, 4-10 June 2008.

APPROVED.

Minute on our religious imperative to foster sensitivity and reconciliation in shifting society

1. In recent years, there have been intense social upheavals emerging from insult, injury and offence aimed at religious communities. The causes of these conflicts are complex and often result from migration and other effects of globalization. Some, in once stable communities in Europe for instance, view these shifts in cultural and religious identities as a threat, leading to xenophobic reactions.
2. Migrants, quite often deeply rooted in religious traditions and practices, bring new dimensions to public debates that both enrich and challenge established secular patterns of life. These new challenges, including those occasioned by the displacement of traditional religious communities, find expression in intensive debates about the role of religion in the public and political realm, and in particular in the tension between freedom of expression and respect for religious symbols and values.
3. In this context, we echo the concern expressed in the Netherlands and in other parts of the world following rumours of the release of a film against the Qur'an by a Dutch member of parliament.
4. As a fellowship of churches we recall the clear and unequivocal biblical injunction to "love the stranger" in our midst (Deuteronomy 10:19) and that in Jesus' teaching to love our neighbour, the neighbour is often the one we do not recognize (Luke 10:25-37).
5. We affirm that it is imperative that we address the fears and insults that are experienced by all the communities involved in such situations. The "Minute on mutual respect, responsibility and dialogue with people of other faiths," approved at Porto Alegre in 2006, provides a framework for those churches who wish to do so.

Recalling also that some of our churches, particularly those in Asia, Africa and the Middle East have centuries-long experience living in communities of religious and cultural diversity, the central committee of the World Council of Churches, meeting in Geneva, Switzerland, 13-20 February 2008:

- A. **Recommends** to churches facing such challenges to seek opportunities for networking to share the expertise and wisdom of the member churches with experience in living in religious and cultural diversity;
- B. **Encourages** member churches to actively generate a climate of deep respect, communication and mutual understanding in the public sphere by engaging opinion leaders, mass media and other community leaders to emphasize the positive contribution that people of religious faith make to national and community life;
- C. **Affirms** the unique and strategic role, as well as the moral responsibility, of religious leaders to work towards reconciliation and healing within their own and between communities, and **encourages** Christian leaders to initiate and facilitate processes that lead communities not only from hostility to peaceful co-existence but also to celebrations of our common life;
- D. **Urges** Christian leaders to speak directly, consistently and self-critically to their own communities, holding them to the highest ethical standards of loving one's neighbour, and in extending a hand of reconciliation to communities other than one's own, whenever a community, its people and their beliefs have been attacked or insulted;

- E. ***Calls*** upon Christian communities to seek common cause with other religious communities to respond to crises that occur in such a way as to model a non-violent and respectful solution.

APPROVED.

Proposed statement on eco-justice and ecological debt

1. The earth, our home, is confronted by unprecedented, massive and intertwined ecological and socio-economic threats. As human beings, we are made by God as part of God's creation. Taken from the earth (*adamah*), we belong to all life. As God sustains us through the gift of all creation, we are called to be stewards of it. Overexploitation of the earth's resources is destructive and constitutes a debt towards other life and future generations.
2. Relevant to the distress of the earth and human misery might be the biblical witness of the prophet Jeremiah who perceives the connection between socio-economic injustice and environmental crises (Jeremiah 14), and Saint Paul who expresses the yearning of all creation, that children of God will be revealed (Romans 8:19).
3. Having called for the cancellation of foreign illegitimate financial debts claimed from countries of the South for many years, the WCC has taken a step further in addressing the ecological dimension of economic relationships through its work on ecological debt, suggesting that many global financial creditors are at the same time ecological debtors.
4. Ecological debt, an increasingly recognized and researched concept, refers to the debt owed by industrialized countries of the North to countries of the South on account of historical and current resource plundering, environmental degradation and the disproportionate appropriation of environmental space to dump greenhouse gases and toxic wastes. The definition of ecological debt has further evolved to include social aspects, such as the disintegration of indigenous communities and the loss of cultural heritage and values.
5. From the early 1970s, the World Council of Churches has worked on the issue of ecological sustainability. At the 1998 Harare assembly, the adverse impacts of economic globalization on people and the environment came to the fore, leading to the ongoing study process on poverty, wealth and ecology. As an offshoot of these important ecumenical reflections and actions, the WCC, in partnership with churches and civil society organizations in Southern Africa, India, Ecuador, Canada and Sweden, initiated work on ecological debt in 2002, focusing on awareness-building, study and advocacy.
6. According to our understanding, there are clear dynamic linkages between dominant economic systems on the one hand, and ecological degradation on the other. Deregulation has increasingly eroded and transferred government decision-making power to profit-oriented transnational corporations at the expense of environmental protection. In the relentless pursuit of macroeconomic growth, international financial institutions have imposed structural adjustment programmes on indebted countries with ecological consequences. Moreover, the globalizing of economic models based on ever-expanding production to meet the insatiable consumption demands of industrialized countries of the North has further undermined ecological sustainability.
7. Climate change, the pollution of the atmosphere and water systems, deforestation, desertification, the extinction of plant and animal species and a host of other urgent environmental issues have disproportionately negative effects on impoverished nations, small island states, people of the South, especially women, farmers, fisher folk, indigenous peoples who live in close relationships with nature, people with disabilities and future generations. We recognize that these countries and people are the creditors of a tremendous ecological debt, and that these effects occur both within and across national borders.

8. The concept of ecological debt is grounded on transformative justice and an overriding priority for those on the socio-economic margins of our societies. It serves to counterbalance the USD 1.3 trillion financial debts of countries the South, pointing out that industrialized countries of the North are principal ecological debtors, while people of the South are principal ecological creditors. The ecological destructiveness of international trade and financial systems (in colonial and present times) highlights the need for alternative trade and financial policies that place people and the earth at the centre. Ecological debt reveals the unsustainability of energy-intensive and consumerist lifestyles and the dilemma of replicating these lifestyles in Southern countries.
9. Ecological debt arises from various causal mechanisms. Under the current financial architecture, countries of the South are pressured through loan conditionalities, as well as multilateral and bilateral trade and investment agreements, to pursue export-oriented and resource-intensive growth strategies, which fail to account for the costs of pollution. Secondly, many mega-infrastructure projects (e.g. dams) in countries of the South are financed through foreign lending by international financial institutions, with little consideration of their ecological and social consequences. Thirdly, industrialized Northern countries make disproportionate use of environmental space without adequate compensation. Presently, the ecological footprints of Northern countries average 6.4 ha/person, which is substantially higher than the ecological footprints of Southern countries (0.8 ha/person). Fourthly, economic globalization is increasingly linked to militarization around the world. The ecological destruction that is inflicted during war is a major contributor to ecological debt. Finally, human-induced climate change is one of the most critical examples of ecological debt. Industrialized Northern countries are mainly to blame for greenhouse gas emissions causing climate change. Research indicates that countries of the South will bear a bigger burden of the adverse environmental effects of climate change and its socio-economic impacts including: the displacement of people living in low-lying coastal areas; the loss of sources of livelihood, especially among already marginalized groups such as farmers and fisher folk; food insecurity; and reduced access to water. (Further analysis of climate change is offered in the 2008 central committee minute on global warming and climate change.)
10. Applying the ecological debt framework encourages that Northern nations, their institutions and corporations should, as starting points:
 - a. drastically reduce their greenhouse gas emissions within and beyond the United Nations framework of treaties on climate change, based on historical accountability and the principle of “common, but differentiated responsibilities” and according to fixed timelines;
 - b. compensate countries of the South and people for the costs of climate change mitigation and adaptation based on the “polluter-pays” principle, including through financing disaster-management programmes and investing in green technologies of the South; and
 - c. cancel the illegitimate financial debts being claimed from Southern countries (without reducing official development assistance) to free up resources for mitigation and adaptation.
11. At the core, however, the restoration of right relationships between ecological creditors and debtors, and between people and the earth requires deep transformations in political and economic systems, institutions and policies, as well as in people’s lifestyles and values, both in the North and the South. It has now become patent that there are ecological limits to growth and that countries of the South can no longer traverse the same energy-intensive and consumption-driven growth path as industrialized Northern countries without causing irreparable ecological damages. Churches have an important role to play in building the necessary political will and moral courage to effect these urgent transformations.

In view of the foregoing, the central committee of the World Council of Churches, meeting in Geneva, Switzerland, 13-20 February 2008:

- A. ***Encourages and supports*** churches in their advocacy campaigns around ecological debt and climate change, mindful of the unity of God's creation and of the need for collaborative working between Southern and Northern nations;
- B. ***Calls*** for continued awareness-building of congregations on ecological debt through education and ecumenical formation, through study and action and through the production of relevant Bible study materials;
- C. ***Urges*** churches and church institutions to conduct ecological debt audits, including self-assessment of their own consumption patterns, and specifically the WCC to establish a mechanism to provide for recompense of ecological debt incurred by its gatherings, and to collect positive examples of ecological debt compensation and reparation in partnership with civil society groups and movements;
- D. ***Calls*** for deepening dialogue and building of alliances for the recognition and recompense of ecological debt among ecumenical, religious, economic and political actors and between the churches in Southern and Northern countries;
- E. ***States*** the importance of strategically linking with environmental, peasant, women's, youth, and indigenous peoples' movements through the World Social Forum and other avenues to design alternative proposals to recompense, as well as to avoid amassing ecological debt;
- F. ***Calls*** on the churches to encourage their governments to work for the recognition and recompense of ecological debt as linked to campaigns for the cancellation of financial debts;
- G. ***Calls*** on churches to advocate for corporate social accountability within international and national legal frameworks and to challenge international financial institutions to take responsibility for their policies that have caused ecological destruction.

REFERRED TO CHURCHES FOR REFLECTION.

Narrative:

The public issues committee received the following proposals for action by the central committee.

- A. From the executive committee:
 - 1. Minute on global warming and climate change
 - 2. Statement on democratic electoral processes
 - 3. Request a statement on the crisis in Kenya and the churches' response
 - 4. Request a statement on Pakistan
 - 5. Request a minute on the humanitarian situation in the Gaza Strip

- B. Proposals submitted from the floor by members of the central committee within 24 hours of the announcement of the proposals from the executive committee:
 - 1. Addition to the statement on democratic electoral processes
 - 2. Statement on ecological debt
 - 3. Statement on cluster munitions
 - 4. Statement of appreciation to the government of Australia on initiating reconciliation with the aboriginal peoples by apologizing for the "stolen generations"
 - 5. Appropriate action on the Islam debate in Europe
 - 6. Appropriate action on the situation in Eastern Congo
 - 7. Appropriate action on the ongoing ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka
 - 8. Appropriate action on religious minorities in different countries suffering from discrimination and/or repression
 - 9. Appropriate action on the request received from a member of the central committee to provide information/update on the "Study on Genocide" (central committee August/September 2006)
 - 10. Appropriate action on the request for information about what action has been taken by the WCC regarding Kosovo
 - 11. Appropriate action on the request to include information on the WCC response to the letter from the 138 Muslim scholars.

The public issues committee discussed all proposals received and dealt with them in the following manner.

- 1. On the addition to the statement on democratic electoral processes made by central committee member Rev. Frank Schürer-Behrmann of the Evangelical Church in Germany, it was considered by the public issues committee and was included in the statement.
- 2. On the request for a statement on ecological debt, such a statement was written and is attached in its entirety above.
- 3. On the request for a statement on cluster munitions made by the US Conference of the WCC, such a statement was written and is attached in its entirety above.
- 4. On the request for a statement of appreciation to the government of Australia on initiating reconciliation with the aboriginal peoples by apologizing for the "stolen generations", made by public issues committee member Bishop Irinej of the Serbian Orthodox Church of Australia and New Zealand, it was decided that the WCC general secretary will send a letter to the Australian government echoing these sentiments.
- 5. On the request for appropriate action on the Islam debate in Europe from the Protestant Churches in the Netherlands, with the support of the Old Catholic Church; a minute was drafted

on our religious imperative to foster sensitivity and reconciliation in shifting society and mention of the substance of this proposal was included. The minute is included in its entirety above.

6. On the request for appropriate action on the situation in Eastern Congo made by central committee member Rev. Dr Sharon Watkins of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in the United States of America, it was decided that there was not sufficient time or staff resources to produce a statement on the Congo at this moment. It might be possible that a letter could be drafted by the WCC general secretary regarding this issue.
7. On the request for appropriate action to the ongoing ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka made by substitute central committee member Rev. Dr Pedurupeirisge Jayasiri Thidas of the Methodist Church in Sri Lanka, it was decided that the WCC general secretary should write a letter to member churches in Sri Lanka expressing the support of their fellow WCC member churches worldwide.
8. On the request for appropriate action on the situation of religious minorities in different countries suffering from discrimination and/or repression made by central committee member Rev. Dr Fernando Enns of the Mennonite Church in Germany, the public issues committee took the view that it would not be wise to prepare such a statement. It based this view on two main factors:
 - that there are good reasons against the making of a statement on the issue of religious minorities;
 - that there are more appropriate ways of addressing the situation facing particular religious minorities.

In reaching this conclusion, the committee acknowledges there are many religious minorities throughout the world who suffer from discrimination, harassment, persecution and oppression, including Christian minorities in various countries. The sufferings of these vulnerable minorities range from small irritations to outright violence and killings. The committee also agrees that the WCC must, and indeed is, addressing some if not all of these situations by appropriate means. The committee is also aware of actions taken in several situations by partner churches in support of a suffering Christian minority.

To explain further:

- I. The reasons against making a public statement include:
 - i. each minority situation is unique; while some sort of brief statement of principle against the mistreatment of vulnerable religious minorities could be made, it would be general to the point of platitudinous and serve little purpose;
 - ii. no statement should be issued on any situation facing religious minorities without first consulting those minorities as to the wisdom or otherwise of a statement and on the contents of the statement; clearly this cannot be done with sufficient care and thoroughness during the few days of a central committee meeting;
 - iii. committee members know of situations where the issuing of a statement may well increase the risk of violent action against the religious minority and/or may create further difficulty for overseas churches seeking to provide support and solidarity to such a minority.
- II. Appropriate ways of addressing the situation of vulnerable religious minorities include:
 - i. the WCC already has a project, P603 “Accompanying churches in situations of conflict” (see document GEN/PRO 04 page 43) where action is being taken initially in two countries to address the difficulties faced by Christian minorities;
 - ii. the WCC has in the recent past consulted churches known to be facing difficulties because they are minorities in situations of increasing religious intolerance; through visits

- and/or exchanges of letters and information, the WCC has provided important solidarity and care; this quiet “back-room” action may well be more effective than the issuing of a public statement;
- iii. well-planned visits by “Living Letters”;
 - iv. the committee notes that WCC officers and relevant staff are more than willing to engage with religious minorities facing difficulties, on a case-by-case basis.
9. On the request received from a member of the central committee, Mr. Graham Gerald McGeoch of the Church of Scotland, to provide information/update on the “Study on Genocide” (central committee August/September 2006), the following can be said. The executive committee in 2006 called for a study in order to establish whether the events in Darfur constitute genocide or not. The “Study on Genocide” was never completed due to a series of reasons, related mainly to the absence of specialized staff in public issues in Geneva as well as regional staff in Africa. Furthermore, an ecumenical solidarity visit to Sudan planned for 2007 was put on hold due to a series of other events scheduled to take place towards the end of 2007. However this ecumenical solidarity visit to Sudan, which will include Darfur, will take place in the coming month (from 25 March to 2 April).

The word genocide was used for the first time by the Jewish–Polish lawyer Raphael Lemkin who combined the Greek word *genos* (race or tribe) with the Latin word *cid* (ccido-to massacre, kill). Following the horrors of the Holocaust he campaigned to have genocide recognized as a crime under international law. His efforts gave way to the adoption of the “Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide”, adopted by the UN General Assembly on 9 December 1948 and coming into effect in January 1951. Article II of the said convention offers a legal definition of the crime of genocide according to which genocide means any of the following acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group, as such: a) Killing members of the group; b) Causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group; c) Deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part; d) Imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group; e) Forcibly transferring children of the group to another group. The convention also imposes a general duty on states that are signatories to “prevent and punish” genocide. The same definition was taken up later on by the Statute of the two ad-hoc tribunals; that is the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda (Article 2) and the International Criminal Tribunal for ex-Yugoslavia (Article 4) and finally by the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court (Article 5).

Over the years the definition of genocide has been widely debated. Many have argued that it is too narrow and thus many of the mass killings perpetrated since the adoption of the convention would not fall under it. Some of the arguments invoked in support of this point are that the convention excludes targeted political and social groups. Furthermore, the definition is limited to direct acts against people and excludes acts against the environment which sustains them. Another issue is that proving intention beyond reasonable doubt is extremely difficult. An additional question along these lines is the difficulty of defining or measuring “in part” and establishing how many deaths equal genocide. One more dimension that should also be taken into consideration is the hesitance of UN member states to single out other member states or intervene.

What differentiates genocide from other crimes against humanity is the intent to destroy in whole or in part a national, ethnic, racial or religious group. Otherwise, acts which are directed against those groups with a discriminatory intent but not with intent to destroy them constitute crimes against humanity and not genocide. As becomes evident, there is a very fine line between those two categories which renders the qualification of a certain crime as genocide a very difficult task.

In order to determine whether a particular crime constitutes genocide it needs to be ascertained whether a factual case has been made out of the legal pre-requisites and that is not an easy task. It requires the gathering of concrete evidence that can prove beyond reasonable doubt the commission of such a crime. The gathering of such evidence is not always easy or even possible especially during on going crises, like in the case of Sudan.

In January 2005 an International Commission of Inquiry on Darfur, authorized by UN Security Council Resolution 1564 of 2004, issued a report to the Secretary General stating that, "the Government of the Sudan has not pursued a policy of genocide". Nevertheless, the Commission cautioned that, "this should not be taken in any way as detracting from the gravity of the crimes perpetrated in that region. International offences such as the crimes against humanity and war crimes that have been committed in Darfur may be no less serious and heinous than genocide". Following that, the United Nations Security Council adopted Resolution 1593, on 31 March 2005 referring the ongoing conflict in Darfur to the International Criminal Court (ICC), following which in April 2007, the ICC issued its first arrest warrants in a three-year investigation of war crimes in Darfur, Sudan, naming Janjaweed militia leader Ali Kushayb and Sudanese Humanitarian Affairs Minister Ahmad Muhammed Harun, who is believed to have been one of the masterminds behind the well-reported mass killings and displacements in the region. They are being accused of 51 crimes against humanity and war crimes as the prosecutor did not find sufficient evidence to prosecute for genocide. Meanwhile, the mandate of the special rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Sudan has been extended for one year by the Human Rights Council during its 6th session in December 2007.

From the analysis that proceeded, it becomes evident that genocide is a rather perplexed issue with not just legal but also political parameters. Genocide has legal implications, entailing full-scale intervention by the international community and therefore it can not be used lightly without due consideration and in-depth study of all the elements surrounding a given case. Otherwise it runs the risk of losing its initial meaning and becoming dangerously commonplace.

The study will thus try to explore all those different parameters in reference to the Darfur crisis, keeping in mind that the Darfur crisis should not be seen isolated from Sudan and the Horn of Africa as a whole. Already existing evidence concerning the atrocities that took place in the region will be gathered and carefully studied. However, due consideration has to be given to the fact that WCC as an institution is not in a position to support fact finding missions. Therefore the study will not only be focused or limited in establishing the commission or not of the crime of genocide. What should guide our efforts is to explore ways on how justice can be rendered and impunity combated. To that extent part of the study will also examine the role of the ICC. It should not be disregarded that the ICC referral is intended not only to address impunity and render justice in Darfur, but also to deter the militias through fear of prosecution and to add to the international pressure on the Sudanese government to intervene to end the conflict. The ICC can play an important role but it can not do so without the support of the international community. An indictment without the collaboration of the state concerned has little chance of producing any positive results. Living proof of that fact is that nearly a year after the arrest warrants of the ICC, Sudan has not made any move to execute the warrants. The government does not recognize the jurisdiction of The Hague-based ICC over crimes in Darfur - despite a Security Council resolution requiring Sudan's cooperation - instead insisting that they be investigated and prosecuted locally.

All these issues will be looked at in an effort to find ways not only to address the subject of genocide in Darfur, but also to find ways to fight impunity and grant justice to the people subjected to such flagrant violations of human rights.

FURTHER REPORT ON GENOCIDE TO EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE IN SEPTEMBER 2008.

10. On the request for information about what action has been taken by the WCC regarding Kosovo made by public issues committee member, Archbishop Aristarchos of Constantini, it was said that a Minute on Kosovo was adopted at the last central committee meeting (August-September 2006) and that copies would be provided to this session's plenary.
11. In response to a request to include information on the WCC response to the letter from the 138 Muslim scholars, the committee recommends not including a specific reference to the letter in "the minute on our religious imperative to foster sensitivity and reconciliation in shifting society". Rather, it reports that the WCC has responded to the Muslim leaders' letter thus far by:
 - seeking responses from member churches;
 - gathering Christian scholars of Islam to a consultation in order to prepare a commentary on the letter for the use of our member churches so that they may consider this a new opportunity for dialogue with Muslims.

It is important to note that the WCC response is the initiation of a process and not another letter. The following actions are anticipated:

- a letter from the General Secretary to Prince Ghazi and the 138 Muslim leaders explaining our process of preparing for dialogue together with our churches and inviting them to do the same with mosques;
- the letter will also call for the forming of a joint Muslim-Christian working group;
- it is anticipated that this group will prepare and invite participants to a series of dialogues with the 138 Muslim leaders and Christian leaders.