



## Report of the General Secretary

### The Courage to Hope and the Future of the Ecumenical Movement

*May the God of hope  
fill you with all joy  
and peace in believing,  
so that you may abound in hope  
by the power of the Holy Spirit.  
(Rom 15:13)*

#### Financial crisis and economic recession – a moment of truth

1. “Sully” Sullenberger emerged as a public hero when he landed US Airways flight 1549 on the waters of the chilly Hudson River on 15 January 2009. The plane stayed afloat so that all 155 passengers could be rescued.
2. Turbo-capitalism did not manage a safe water landing. The burst of the financial bubble in 2008 had disastrous consequences for the real economy and for real people. Far too many are struggling to keep their homes, their jobs, their little enterprise or just the basic means of survival for their families and themselves. It is a widely shared opinion that the age-old sin of greed (Eph. 4:19) has been at the origins of the crisis. The debate centres on exorbitant profit rates in the financial markets that leaders of the big international banks wanted to see above 25%. High risks were taken by their employees to satisfy these expectations and to earn personal bonuses that have been and, it seems, still continue to be far, far beyond anything poor communities can even imagine.
3. Building on the rich tradition of the church and more than three decades of reflection on just and sustainable societies in the ecumenical movement, we know, however, that the problem is much deeper. Even the economic growth of the world economy in the past could be achieved only at the expense of poor communities, future generations and nature. Mahatma Gandhi’s mantra rings ever true: nature provides enough for human need, but not for human greed. The Canberra assembly in 1991 contrasted the unlimited and thus destructive growth of the cancer cell with the growth of a tree that matures in close relationship and balance with its environment. The relationship between land, labour, capital and information is totally out of balance, tilting in favour of capital and information systems. Reading the recent papal encyclical *Caritas in Veritate*, I am grateful for the great consensus among major church traditions that we have to focus on the needs of the poor, the role of labour and the relationship with creation.

4. With the crash-landing of the casino economy, we finally arrived in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Deceived by the enormous economic growth and the optimistic rhetoric of protagonists of economic globalization, many of us thought of the 21<sup>st</sup> century as an era of limitless new opportunities which required constant change and adjustments to the victorious course of the global economy and the technologies supporting it. There was little appreciation for traditional knowledge, values and customs. There were doubts even among us as to whether the trajectory of the ecumenical movement's critique was still on the right track.

5. It is true that we encountered new horizons and addressed some key challenges with greater urgency. I think here of care for creation, the need for inter-religious co-operation in the context of violence and war, and the cry for transformative justice from so many corners of the world. The changing ecclesial landscape and the experience of increasing pluralism also challenged ecumenism in new ways. We re-learned that ecumenism must embrace a vision for life in all its fullness (John 10:10, Luke 4:16 ff.).

6. In all of these areas, we could see that change was not going to be smooth and easy. To keep human dignity and sustainability of life at the heart of the development of our societies and at the centre of international relationships between peoples and states is rather a constant struggle. Church leaders pointed to the need for a strong moral and spiritual dimension of life in community. But still the belief that humankind had all the technology, capital and other means to shoulder these challenges and to manage them was the prevailing attitude.

7. I hope we have woken up. I hope we see that climate change, the prevailing deep economic crisis, violence and war in many places, and the critical transition from an era dominated by the US and its allies to a multi-polar world system with, *inter alia*, China, India, Brazil, South Africa as important players, that all these and other challenges reflect at their heart a crisis of life in community. They require our common witness to the reconciling and healing mission of the crucified and risen Christ and the commitment to unity and mutual accountability among us (Rom 5:1-11; 2 Cor 5:17-21). True grace is costly. We cannot expect to find it cheaper. A relevant witness of the churches in today's world is no longer possible if churches stay divided and cannot demonstrate to the world that the transformative power of the gospel of Jesus Christ is the driving force in making the whole church a sign and foretaste of a united humanity that cares for each other and for this planet.

8. We are facing a moment of truth (2 Cor 13:5-8). We will fail, however, if we give in to simple juxtapositions between unity and truth, or unity and diversity (Rom 12:4-8; 1 Cor 12:1-31). There are indeed deep tensions among and within churches concerning doctrine, as well as concerning issues of lifestyles and personal ethics. This is a reality we cannot deny. During my recent visit to the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) we had a serious encounter with the leadership of one of our member churches, the Church of Jesus Christ on Earth by His Special Envoy Simon Kimbangu (the Kimbanguist Church), concerning the doctrine of the Holy Trinity. The WCC, the AACC and the Organization of African Instituted Churches (OAIC) jointly have gone through an exhaustive dialogue with leaders of the Kimbanguist Church. In July we sent representatives who, apart from a meeting with the spiritual chief of the Kimbanguist Church, also experienced their worship service at Nkamba, re-named New Jerusalem by the church. After a very careful assessment of these experiences and the most recent official pronouncements by the Kimbanguist leaders, we can only conclude that the Kimbanguist Church is excluding itself from the fellowship as long as its leaders continue to pursue statements and conduct their services in ways that are incompatible with the doctrine of the Holy Trinity. I request that this central committee make a decision on the future relationship between the Kimbanguist Church and the WCC taking into account the latest response from the church's spiritual chief in which he passionately requests comprehensive accompaniment by the WCC, AACC and OAIC.

9. Whilst on other travels, I have seen churches almost breaking apart because of conflicts regarding ethical issues such as human sexuality. I have observed increasing tensions between member churches within the WCC fellowship due to differing views and positions on human sexuality. I am grateful that the Faith and Order commission has begun to address those concerns, the outcome of which will help the

council to find the best ways of accompanying our member churches as they struggle with these potentially church-dividing issues.

10. The broken and deeply divided world, however, needs the common witness of churches that show how to reconcile with each other and to overcome divisions (John 17:20-21). The economic recession and its impact on people and the distribution of power between peoples and states are not merely a very, very difficult challenge to societies, but also to the common witness of the churches. These churches must lead us to concentrate again on the core values and goals of the ecumenical movement. Like our predecessors, we need to think ahead of our time. We need prudent discernment as we seek to move forward towards unity and improve our common witness despite the still remaining theological differences and new conflicts over ethical issues.

11. In a decade from now, we shall need to see tangible results of a greater commitment to unity. And we should be able to show that churches have helped their societies and the international community of states in building more just and peaceful relationships among people and with nature. I am encouraged by the positive responses we have received regarding the plenaries on church and society scheduled later on the agenda of this meeting. People and planet need such a decisive witness of committed Christians as a source of hope and encouragement to act (Rom 8:19). The ecumenical movement will be relevant in the world to the extent to which we can be instrumental in giving the people, and especially the younger generation, a firm reason to live and hope.

### **The hope-factor - balancing between inspiring vision and realism**

12. I hope it is unnecessary to emphasize that the “courage to hope” has been a central theme of my personal ecumenical journey<sup>1</sup>. Confronted with poverty, the surge of HIV and AIDS, communal and ethnic violence, and degrading land and water resources, people in Africa have taught me the importance of hope that is rooted in faith and celebrated in community. Although so many of them have reason to be apathetic and desperate, their faith in God and their trust in the *ubuntu* – community of life – have kept them alive and have motivated them to go on. I saw again such courage to hope in my recent visit to the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). People survive and affirm their dignity despite horrible violence and terror around them, all because of their faith in God and their capacity to keep hope alive in their communities.

13. With roots in the African soil, and in Kenya no less, the US President, Barack Obama, has embodied the “audacity of hope” for the many people who voted for him. They had every reason to be discouraged and afraid. The biggest financial crises since the “great depression” in the last century overshadowed the election campaign. As we observe the role of the hope-factor in internal and foreign policies of the new president, we may observe how doors that were closed and hearts that were frozen are gradually opening up. Hope is a powerful force in the lives of people. It can change the attitudes and behaviours of individuals and communities, and it can sustain them in difficult times.

14. But this is true only for genuine hope. Genuine hope is written into the hearts and minds of people through the songs they sing, the stories they tell to their children, the feasts they celebrate, the values they cherish, the collective wisdom they preserve, and the visions they share. Genuine hope is rooted in culture and religious traditions. The difference between illusions and genuine hope is apparent when promises for a better future turn out to be hollow or empty. Illusions based on false promises do not stand the test when the wonderfully painted curtains are lifted and people are confronted again with the harsh realities of our times. The message of hope articulated by President Obama will remain credible in difficult times only insofar as it is rooted in genuine hope of the people themselves and insofar as its inspiring vision is coupled with realism (Proverbs 11:7 and 13:12).

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<sup>1</sup> Samuel Kobia, *The Courage to Hope*, Geneva: WCC, 2003

15. Christian faith has proven so strong in moments of deep crisis and despair because the good news of the gospel is sealed by the crucified and risen Christ. He himself is our hope (1Tim 1:1; Col 1:27) – Christ, who identifies himself on the cross with the suffering, their broken bodies and souls, and who, in his resurrection, is stronger than the power of death (Acts 2:22 ff; Rom 5:1-5). Hope in Christ is renewed when and where the church follows the crucified and risen Christ and stands at the side of the suffering people in their pain (2Cor 1:3-7, Mt 25:31-46). This hope in Christ is shared in community and made known to the world (Eph 4:1-6; Col 1:24-29; 1Peter 3:15). All creation awaits with eager longing to be reconciled with God (Rom 8:18-30). Holding together cross and resurrection, the sinful reality we are facing and the good news of the gospel, hope in Christ combines realism with the inspiring vision of God's reign to come. The sinful and deadly reality around us can be transformed by Christ as God's love is communicated both by people who are witnesses to Christ's self-emptying love and in all the wonders of God's creation as it is continually renewed by the Holy Spirit. Churches are called to embody such hope in moments of joy and in moments of crisis.

### **Discovering hope among those yearning for justice and peace**

16. During my tenure as general secretary of the WCC, I have constantly emphasized the pastoral dimension of this ministry and have concentrated on the quality of relationships among member churches and with ecumenical partners. I especially wanted churches in difficult situations to be assured of the fact that they are not alone; to experience that they are not left alone, but are accompanied and held up in prayer by the fellowship (Eph 3:14-20). I am glad that many of those who were interviewed by the mid-term evaluation team underlined that whenever they experienced this accompaniment through the fellowship in tangible ways or were themselves involved in the support of others, their membership in the WCC was especially meaningful to them. They felt they were in living contact with other churches within the fellowship. For this reason, the focus on the Middle East or the "Living Letters" of the Decade to Overcome Violence were highlighted as the WCC programmes with which churches and ecumenical partners felt closely associated. The "Living Letters" are expressions of the fellowship we share, of the commitment and care we show to and for each other. They demonstrate that our common hope in Christ empowers us to accompany each other in hard times and challenging situations.

17. In my pastoral journeys to the different regions of the world, I was both deeply touched and enriched by the signs of hope that I discovered among those who were yearning for justice and peace in the midst of suffering and despair. I referred already to my recent visit to the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). The DRC is the third largest country in Africa, a nation the size of Western Europe. The country has become the embodiment of human pain. War in the DRC has killed some 4.3 million people in the last five years, many through starvation and disease. The humanitarian crisis is unimaginable especially for those who are cut off from international aid, although communities in the east of the country do their utmost to shelter their fellow internally displaced compatriots. Forty percent of those who were killed are women and children. The brutal violence against women and children is an abomination to the sanctity of life, an open disgrace to God and the human community.

18. Africans lament of the rhino, one of the endangered species on the account of poachers, that its horn was its curse. The people of the DRC feel the same as far as the rich resources of the Congo basin are concerned. The diamonds, gold, coltan, uranium, etc. have become a curse for the people living there since colonial times. The violent colonial history, summarized in the book *King Leopold's Ghost*,<sup>2</sup> continues to haunt the people to date. This reality was not lost on the WCC executive committee which stated in very clear terms:

“The tortured DRC continues to generate blood fortunes that swell the coffers of some architects of globalization and a consortium of international criminals who supply arms in exchange for minerals. DRC's tropical forest, the largest in Africa, provides safe haven for rebels from neighbouring countries.

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<sup>2</sup> Adam Hochschild, *King Leopold's Ghost: A Story of Greed, Terror, and Heroism in Colonial Africa*, Mariner Books, 1998, New York.

These countries have felt justified in crossing into the DRC in pursuit of the rebels to safeguard their own national security.”

19. The whole region of the Great Lakes has yet to find peace following the horrific crime of the 1994 Rwandan genocide. My first travel as general secretary of the WCC brought me not only to my home-country Kenya, but also to Rwanda ten years after the catastrophe. It was my wish to be with those who had suffered this enormous human tragedy at the beginning of my ministry as WCC general secretary. And while the traces and remnants of the genocide and victims of mutilation and rape were still to be found everywhere, there was also this tremendous capacity of people to care for life and for the future of their communities despite all the atrocities and destruction they had suffered and despite all the difficulties they were still facing - an enormous spirit of resilience. I saw the glimpse of hope in the eyes of the survivors, their faith in God's life-giving power, although the churches had often not been sanctuaries for the persecuted.

20. Such hope was a powerful sign of the unbroken humanity of the victims. Such hope enabled people to stretch out their hands even to the perpetrators of the crimes and to work for reconciliation with the former enemy. Restoring the dignity of the victims and re-building communities required an understanding of restorative justice that has to be at the heart of the transition towards a new society where justice and peace would prevail. The churches of Rwanda and their council in partnership with the government and civil society are doing a commendable job of social and spiritual transformation of the society which had been ravaged by the genocide. As fellow members in the fellowship we are called to increase our support and solidarity and even learn from their efforts and ingenuity including the spirit of *Kachacha* – the traditional approach to forgiveness and reconciliation.

21. I witnessed a similar spirit of resilience and hope in my travels to the Philippines where extrajudicial killings are rampant; in Israel-Palestine where the effects of occupation are easily evident: both the occupier and the occupied are dehumanized; in former military dictatorships in Latin America, and also in many other parts of the world. In all of these places, people had this strong will and capacity to survive under serious threats, still sustaining hope for a life with dignity and peace, which would be the fruit of justice. Inspired and encouraged by these experiences, I came to recognize “transformative justice” as the other theme that complemented the “courage to hope” on my faith journey as general secretary.

22. Today, I am more than ever convinced that opening pathways for the healing of wounded and sometimes poisoned memories and moving forward towards the goal of reconciled communities require a strong focus on transition. The processes towards justice should not be limited. Transition is necessary not only in the political and economic realms, but transition must include a cosmic dimension as well. I am equally convinced that in these great transitions, we as humanity on planet earth will need both the courage to hope and an unbreakable commitment to transformative justice that is rooted in the love of God, our fellow human beings and the whole creation.

23. Whenever I open the Bible and begin to read – whether I start with the five books of Moses, with the Psalms or one of the prophets, with one of the gospels or one of the letters written by Paul or another apostle – I am always drawn to the Triune God's life-giving love that, in Jesus Christ, is revealed in human form and demonstrates the potential for just relationships among us. The divided churches will become one again if, moved by the Holy Spirit, we embrace the life-giving love of God and live it ourselves for the sake of this world that so desperately needs it (1Cor 13:13).

### **Building relationships among regions and between generations**

24. In the same way as the churches need to be one, the many nations in the different regions of the world, the diverse peoples, women and men, young and old, must learn to overcome oppressive relationships that result in violence and war, working together on behalf of a just and sustainable future for all of humanity (Rev 22:1-5).

25. Interdependence in space and time is one of the most powerful factors of change today. The WCC is taking up the challenges of acting interdependently on a global scale:

- Focusing on the political and economic spheres of life, we have addressed this reality in the context of our work on globalization.
- Concentrating on the global movements of people, we have highlighted the impact of migration on countries and churches in all regions of the world.
- Being concerned about the future of the ecumenical movement and the need for ecumenical formation of the leaders of today and tomorrow, we have made special efforts for the full participation of young people in the life of the movement.

26. While putting the emphasis on the fellowship of member churches, we have also nurtured inter-regional and inter-generational co-operation in recent years. Again, my pastoral visits to member churches have helped me to see the importance of these two approaches for the work of the WCC, the regional ecumenical organizations (REOs), other ecumenical partners and the specialized ministries who have continued faithfully to provide the desperately needed financial resources to the diverse ecumenical organizations.

27. In my visit to the Middle East last year I was accompanied by the general secretaries of the Middle East Council of Churches (MECC) and the Christian Conference of Asia (CCA). We began our journey with a joint consultation on migration, meeting in Beirut, Lebanon with participants from the MECC, CCA, the WCC and the Conference of European Churches (CEC). Churches in the Middle East are seriously concerned that more and more Christians are leaving the region that has been home of some of the oldest churches. In the context of war and violence in the region, people are desperately searching for security for themselves and their families. We witnessed this firsthand in Damascus where we met with scores of Iraqi Christians who had been forced to leave their country simply because they were Christians and the occupation of their country was seen as a form of modern day Christian crusade. This issue requires, at the least, close co-operation with churches in the receiving countries but, even more, a common commitment for peaceful solutions to the conflicts in the region. We must all play a part in finding solutions. The Middle East needs peace and needs it today, for tomorrow is too late!

28. To fully understand the gravity of the ongoing construction of Israeli settlements in the Occupied Palestinian Territories (OPT), we must see the situation within the broader historical context of ethnic upheaval in Palestine which paved the way for the creation of the modern state of Israel. Israelis recall “The War of Independence”, but for Palestinians this period will forever be the *Nakba*, the “catastrophe”, remembered by many as a form of “ethnic cleansing” that saw the largest forced migration in modern history. It is estimated that no less than a million people were expelled from their homes at gunpoint, civilians were massacred, hundreds of Palestinian villages deliberately destroyed, mosques and churches profaned, and convents and schools vandalized.<sup>3</sup> What in 1948 was described by Palestinian leaders as “racism and ghettoizing the Palestinians in Haifa” has by the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century in the West Bank, East Jerusalem and Gaza become a full-blown apartheid system complete with its brand of “Bantustans”.

29. Despite fresh signs of hope internationally, events in the Occupied Palestinian Territories demonstrate yet again the unyielding nature of Israel’s occupation and the endless creation of new obstacles to peace. The trend that speaks loudest about occupation policies is the multiplication and expansion of settlements on land taken from Palestinians. Even a settlement freeze requested by Israel’s strongest ally remains in limbo, along with the meaningful negotiations such a freeze could facilitate. Instead there are large urban settlement construction projects and many smaller projects taking place throughout the West Bank and East Jerusalem. The current evictions of Palestinian families and demolition of their homes in East Jerusalem underscore the trend. Hundreds of church-owned properties are at risk. Such actions hobble the efforts by the new US administration to reach out to the Middle East as whole.

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<sup>3</sup> Pappé, Ilan: The Ethnic Cleansing of Palestine, p. 208. One World Publications Ltd., Oxford 2006.

30. Occupation along with the concomitant humiliation of a whole people for over six decades constitutes not just economic and political crimes but, like anti-Semitism, it is a sin against God. We have already said since 1948 that anti-Semitism was a sin against God. Are we ready to say that occupation is also a sin against God? Two hundred settlements with 400,000 inhabitants have been established in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, since 1967. I urge this central committee to adopt the public policy statement expressly addressing this issue because settlements have been and will remain incompatible with a just peace that must serve both Palestinians and Israelis and must secure viable and mutually recognized states for both peoples.

31. At its meeting in Crete shortly after the 1967 war that began the occupation, the WCC central committee rejected any nation – including Israel – keeping or annexing the territory of another. At the Harare assembly in 1998 and many other times, the WCC has cited the problem of settlements. Our consistent appeal is for the governments involved to enforce the Geneva Convention's prohibition against changes in the population and character of occupied territories. Our concern to end the occupation is urgent but not new.

32. The Middle East is also an important destination and step on the way to Europe and North America for migrants from Asia and even from Africa. In our visit to the Gulf States we saw the plight of the many migrant workers from Asia and Africa and their efforts to gather for worship together with other Christians. It is gratifying that, inspired by our visit, the small but vibrant Christian community in the Gulf States formed an ecumenical forum which with our continued support is growing from strength to strength. We realized that we should have invited the general secretary of the All Africa Conference of Churches (AACC) to join us in this endeavour. I am very grateful for the excellent co-operation between the Conference of European Churches (CEC), the Conference of Churches in Asia (CCA), the Middle Eastern Council of Churches (MECC) and the All Africa Conference of Churches (AACC) on migration and related concerns. The WCC will continue to provide space at the global level to facilitate participation of other regional ecumenical organizations and ecumenical partners in their critical and challenging ministry.

33. The presence of migrants and migrant churches has a deep impact on communities and churches, especially in Europe and North America. The face of the local church in the big cities of these regions has changed considerably with the presence of migrant communities from all over the world. While the membership of the traditional churches in Western Europe and also in North America continues to shrink, worship and community life of migrant communities is shaping the face of Christianity in these regions more and more. What are the missiological implications of this phenomenon as the mission movement that had its origins in these regions now comes back in the form of Christian migrant communities? An adequate response to these changes requires a new understanding of the local church and exactly the type of inter-regional co-operation that we are developing together with other partners. I have been impressed by the small church community of the Remonstrant Brother- and Sisterhood in the Netherlands that opened itself up to migrant communities fully aware that it is an aging community, which needs to conceive a new future for itself. I am grateful also that the CEC assembly last month in Lyon, France, affirmed again the commitment of the churches in Europe to address migration not only as a social, but also as an ecclesial concern.

34. The primary thematic focus of the visit in 2008 to the Pacific region was climate change, the French nuclear weapons testing in Mururoa and its long-lasting effects, and the climate refugees who will have to be evacuated from their islands. The climate change phenomenon is as much the result of a selfish human-centred approach to development as it is an ethical crisis nurtured by the greed of a few to keep their high levels of consumption at the expense of ecology and the majority who live in abject poverty. It is also, therefore, a justice issue and must be addressed as such. Our visit was seen as an assurance of the WCC's commitment to being in solidarity with the people and the churches of the Pacific region in their struggle to come to terms with the effects of climate change, the worst effect being the possible disappearance of some of the low-lying islands due to the rising sea levels. We must be prepared to accompany the churches and the Pacific Conference of Churches in their initiatives towards the

evacuation of the citizens of those islands which will disappear for ever. For those affected the emotional, psychological, cultural, spiritual and economic implications of this reality are unprecedented. But the possible evacuation of whole communities has ecclesial and ecclesiological implications. The strong presence of the actively practising Pacific Christians will have tremendous impact on the face of Christianity in places like Australia and Aotearoa-New Zealand which are among the potential receiving communities.

35. The WCC also has supported and fostered inter-regional co-operation on issues other than migration, e.g. on trade, climate change and inter-religious dialogue and cooperation. We have learned to identify clearly the distinct roles of the regional ecumenical organizations that are involved and of the WCC as a global actor, together with other ecumenical partners in response to our interdependence in space. But we have focused even more deliberately on ecumenical formation and participation of young people in recognition of the interdependence in time. Some of us might be tempted to envy Pentecostal and post-denominational churches for their media presence that attracts many young people. We are still struggling to reach out to young people through electronic media and other means. But perhaps this is not the best way for us to interact with youth. I have seen other, very successful examples of the involvement of young Christians. In December 2007 over 40,000 young Christians from Europe and beyond took Geneva by storm in response to year-end activities led by the Taizé community. For several days we witnessed these young people living their Christian faith more fully as they sang, prayed, reflected on the critical socio-economic issues of our times and tried to discern their role in addressing them. This was a very encouraging sign of hope for rejuvenation of the church in Europe.

36. During my visits to the German Kirchentag and to the Maramon convention in the Indian state of Kerala, I saw other great examples. Both of these are gatherings of more than 100,000 Christians, and the majority among them are young people. In the Kirchentag as in the Maramon convention young people are truly present and their presence and participation inspires hope in old and young alike. They inter-act with each other and with leadership of the churches in more lively ways. When I saw the many young people patiently squatting under a *pandal* of coconut leaves on the dry sandbed of the river Pampa near the village of Maramon, I discarded the sermon I had prepared, realizing that this crowd was looking for a pastoral message and wanted to see itself in the context of Christ's mission today. So I preached to the gathering about encountering Jesus and the urgency of Christian presence in society. "The world is burning," I said, "and God is looking for those who can save it". And this ministry of rescuing the perishing and the dying, and confronting the powers and principalities, has been entrusted to the young people.

### **The roles and functions of the WCC**

37. "The world is burning and God is looking for those who can save it," those ready to participate with God in the great project of saving the world. God loved this world so much that he sent his only son to rescue it from the destructive consequences of human sin and to reconcile it to God (John 3:16). That this world is not to be destroyed, but to be saved, has always motivated me in my ecumenical journey. For I understand atonement to be the most decisive action that God has taken since the creation of Adam and Eve. And God's reconciliation is not only with human beings but with the whole creation.

38. When we concentrate as the WCC on living the fellowship of churches through relational bonds of solidarity and accompaniment between and among member churches, we are not searching for the unity of the church as an end in itself, but for the sake of the future of humanity and all of God's creation (Rom 8, Eph 1:10, Col 1:15-20, Rev 21-22). Ecumenism draws us to the broader horizon of God's history of salvation and does not allow us to take comfort in smaller horizons of community and of ethnic or national belonging. We are called to free ourselves from all loyalties and human bonds that hinder us from living for this broader vision. This is hard, yet we have no viable choice but to accept this higher calling.

39. While I am clearly affirming the guideline of the Common Understanding and Vision document (CUV) and its focus on the fellowship of member churches, I want to underline that this fellowship is not



without purpose. This fellowship is called to restore the unity of the church so that the world may believe (John 17:21). Theological dialogue and the common witness and service to the world belong together on the way towards deeper unity among the churches, which remains our central goal.

40. Being and fostering the life of the fellowship of churches, the WCC is first and foremost the ecumenical space where member churches advance together towards visible unity and support one another in their life and in their witness to the world. More than just an organization, the council is the space in which churches are enabled to live the fellowship as churches call each other to account for the visible unity we seek. The WCC is also the space where member churches and ecumenical partners can meet, share our hopes and concerns, stand alongside each other in solidarity, challenge each other, interpret global trends, discern the tasks we are confronted with together, facilitate common action and find common voice in listening together to the gospel of Christ and to each other's experiences in our life and faith.

41. The WCC fulfils a series of key roles in the quest for visible unity, as has been identified with increasing clarity over the past few years:

42. The council has *a convening role*, bringing together ecumenical partners, member churches and other churches, in the context of an "ecumenical space" for discourse and agenda-setting.

43. The council provides the potential for *a common voice* with which the churches may address a clear, prophetic vision to the world.

44. The World Council of Churches provides mechanisms of *mutual accountability*, extends *solidarity* and offers *accompaniment* for churches and others in demanding circumstances.

45. The WCC is also called to the task of fostering greater *coherence* within the one ecumenical movement.

46. Each of these key roles is integral to the whole and must not be separated from one another in considering the unique calling of the World Council of Churches.

47. The mid-term evaluation we receive at this meeting underlines that it is critical for the future to translate this understanding of the roles and functions of the WCC into an approach that integrates different dimensions of the life and work of the fellowship. It also involves participatory methodologies in sharing programmatic work with member churches and partners. Their involvement and participation is crucially important so that the WCC is seen not as an organization "out there", but as the common space and the common voice we shape and promote together. We put great currency in the convening role of the WCC because gathered together in a credible manner facilitates our common voice and serves the coherence of the ecumenical movement. The significance of this role has been highlighted by the continuation committee on Ecumenism in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century in its recent meeting in Belem, Brazil and in a very similar way by the assembly discernment committee (ADC).

48. In order to fulfil these roles and functions, churches and ecumenical partners need to share common commitments and to make themselves accountable to each other. The report of the ADC points to the fact that we need to recognize that there are different levels of commitment within the broader ecumenical movement. It is very important that this be reflected in our approaches and methodologies. This concern is of special importance in view of the Global Christian Forum (GCF) as a new and broadly inclusive ecumenical platform, with the participation of Pentecostal and charismatic churches and communities. We will continue to explore together how greater unity among Christians from all traditions can grow through the GCF. We will also nurture relationships with those who still keep their distance from the conciliar ecumenical movement as we seek to work together on a number of issues of common concern, such as the understanding of mission, the code of conduct on conversion, and an array of social and environmental concerns.

49. We are committed to these new forms of co-operation, although we do not deny that there are still important differences that we must address in dialogue. At this point in time, the Global Christian Forum cannot replace the WCC in regard to its functions for and services to member churches and the wider ecumenical movement. Indeed, the GCF depends on a functioning and flourishing WCC for its own stability and growth. The depth of accountability and commitment towards each other that is shared within the fellowship of member churches in the WCC is too important and precious for the future of the ecumenical movement to be ceded to anyone else.

### **The present moment – the birthplace of the future**

50. I am very grateful to the emerging consensus regarding the basic role and functions of the WCC for member churches, ecumenical partners and the broader ecumenical movement that we can observe in the two reports of the continuation committee on Ecumenism in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century and of the assembly discernment committee. I am convinced that we are moving towards greater clarity as to how these insights can be translated into projects and activities in the programmatic work of the WCC. This central committee is in many ways crucial for the future of the WCC and the ecumenical movement – not only because you will elect the new WCC general secretary, but also because of the decisions you will take concerning the next assembly, the governance and management of the WCC, and necessary adjustments in the programmatic work.

51. A comprehensive report on our programmatic work since the last central committee meeting has been prepared for substantive discussions by the programme committee which will process any comments and proposals for the decision by the central committee. I would like to make a brief reflection on the experiences we have had with this integrated approach and comment on some learnings thereof.

52. The assembly in 2006 had called for an integrated and interactive programme structure for the WCC with emphasis on the interrelatedness of all the work, structurally – moving from independent programmes and projects to the concept of “one WCC programme” which would intentionally integrate programmes and relationships. Since 2006 the attempt has been to work on a more coherent programme plan modelled from the threefold vision for transformation drawn from the assembly’s message.

53. The intended goal of the new model since that time was to “improve the quality and impact of work undertaken by the WCC as a fellowship of its member churches around the world; aims at integration and interaction, flexibility and responsiveness; cooperative style of work and partnership with others in the ecumenical movement”.<sup>4</sup> According to the mid-term programme evaluation the “methodology of working in new ways and in new structures are in place and are becoming visible and focused within programme areas. While this approach may minimize isolation and working in ‘silos’ and contribute to programme integration, the impacts on staff time and work load are yet to be assessed. For example, the attempt to ensure staff inter programme collaboration by working in interactive staff teams across programme units has had mixed results and needs further work and discussion with regard to effectiveness and efficiency.”<sup>5</sup>

54. However, the move towards integration has helped in defining the specific roles of the WCC in the midst of the complexity of the ecumenical movement and the many organizations and ecumenical bodies active in the world. It has facilitated the clarification of the WCC’s convening role in the wider ecumenical movement by interpreting global trends and in providing the possibilities for the churches and ecumenical partners to act together with appropriate responses to global issues and contexts, while still trying to maintain the coherence of the ecumenical movement.

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<sup>4</sup> Organizational Structure of the Work of the WCC, central committee 2006, Doc No Gen 4

<sup>5</sup> Report on the WCC Mid-Term Programme Evaluation for the Period 2006-2008, central committee 2009, Doc. GEN/PRO 03.

55. There are a couple of challenges that we still face. The first challenge is that such integration requires sustained and often lengthy “processes” where the results of the work are not obvious in a limited time frame. Sometimes the WCC’s activities when done with other partners have built into them long-term objectives where activities and staff resources would be needed to contribute to the same final outcome and this is not always easy to quantify or recognize.

56. The second challenge is the nature of the work in which the WCC engages. The WCC staff has worked very intentionally to produce detailed planning within a three-year cycle. This is done across teams in the secretariat as well as with partners all over the world. However, when a crisis in a country or a conflict requires an urgent ecumenical response, this cannot be planned in advance and usually needs a great deal of coordination with other ecumenical partners. Unexpected events require the setting aside of staff and financial resources in addition to the thorough plans already established by each programme for the year.

57. Although each programme and activity may have a specific impact on the churches and ecumenical family, there are common learnings from our work with the churches that run across programmatic lines.

58. The commitment to the search for visible unity of the church and a common witness to the world are owned by the churches from all the different traditions, but today this vision is challenged to respond to the changing ecclesial landscape, a deeper awareness of God’s relationship to creation as well as our own and our relationships with other faith traditions and religions in increasingly pluralistic societies.

59. The diversity within our fellowship is exciting, but it is not enough alone. Our diversity enriches us when there is a sense of mutual belonging and sharing along with that range of traditions and cultures. It is through more intentional inter-action among member churches and ecumenical partners that can bring the greater coherence within the ecumenical movement called for in the CUV.

60. Shrinking resources, both in terms of human and financial, push the WCC and the global ecumenical movement towards a one-language working methodology and output policy (i.e. in English). New ecclesial configurations, however, require a wider rather than narrower approach, including major languages of the global south. This is the responsibility of all of us – member churches, ecumenical partners and the WCC secretariat – but may need a global approach at the level of WCC and related ecumenical partners.

61. I would like to express my deep appreciation to the members of the Working Group on Governance, Accountability and Staff Policy and strongly commend the findings of the report which is presented to the central committee for action. The recommendations with a short-term range included in this report intend to enhance and strengthen the spirit of the fellowship, simply by bringing clarity and transparency to a long, rich – but also quite complex – institutional practice and tradition. The recommendations with a mid-term and long-term range merit all our attention since they aim at equipping the World Council of Churches with governance and management structures adapted to our rapidly evolving world, including our radically changing ecumenical landscape.

62. The observation of the Working Group that the Council’s governance structure has evolved very little since its inception in the 1930s is quite valid and eloquent. The underlying assumption of the report that the suggested changes are grounded in the spirit of the policy statement on Common Understanding and Vision of the WCC (CUV) is very compelling. The proposals included in the report for good practice in various areas, following commonly agreed standards, are really valuable. Therefore, I am strongly convinced that we should consider this extremely important process suggested by the report of the Working Group as the natural extension – or as an integral part – of all our efforts to endow the Council in a way that this unique global fellowship of churches can play its proper role within the ecumenical movement of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

63. As I have indicated earlier in my report, there are several processes, alongside with the Working Group on Governance, whose findings and recommendations are presented to this central committee. I have no doubt that the decisions to be made based on these recommendations will have positive impact on the future of the WCC. Concurrently with these processes we have also had internal processes whose outcomes will contribute significantly to the sustainability of the council in the long run. I take the opportunity to preface the following presentation by expressing deep gratitude to the member churches and the specialized ministries for their financial support to the council. More specifically I am grateful for the support that ensured financial stability during my tenure as general secretary.

64. The preparation for the programme plans 2010 and the draft budget 2010 has had to take into account the effects of the worldwide economic crisis. These new financial constraints have serious consequences for the budget of the WCC as a number of churches and partners announced reduced financial support for 2009 as well as for 2010. Decreased income has had to be balanced by reducing direct activity costs, merging or postponing activities, and redeploying staff to fill vacancies. Comparing the draft budget 2010 with the situation of early 2008, the number of staff has been reduced by more than 25 persons.

65. The draft budget 2010 as presented to the central committee for approval includes an increase in unrestricted funds of CHF 0.35 million compared to the target of CHF 0.7 million. Funding requests for 2010 will be confirmed by commitments in the autumn. There is a risk that certain requests may not be met in full due to financial constraints suffered by the funding partners.

66. The draft budget 2010 will need revision to meet the target growth in unrestricted funds. In its meeting of February 2009, the executive committee approved the proposal of the finance sub-committee that “an alternative scenario be drafted with an increase to unrestricted funds of CHF 1.0 million with the objective of providing a margin for unexpected developments or needs in 2010.”<sup>6</sup>

67. In preparing this alternative scenario the staff leadership group noted that, on the one hand, reductions in direct costs have brought budgets for activities and projects to a minimum viable level in many cases. This means that further cuts in direct costs cannot be realized without completely ending a number of projects. On the other hand, further reduction of staff capacity must include the termination of activities and projects.

68. The requirements of an alternative scenario cannot be met without major revisions of the way the council implements its programmatic work. It is therefore only possible to reach the target set by the last executive committee by revisiting seriously and carefully

(a) *the adjustment of the internal management and programme structures.* This might include merging programmes or bringing more than one programme area under one direction. It may also include discontinuing some projects or activities altogether.

(b) *structural changes in the council's way of working.* Such changes should be explored now and implemented in the coming years prior to the assembly in 2013. They might include, to give a few examples, (i) finding and implementing new balances between “the fellowship” and “the organization” (to borrow here language from both the CUV and the Report of the Working Group on Governance, Accountability and Staff policy), (ii) encouraging a stronger involvement of the fellowship in the planning and implementation of the council's work, (iii) promoting the work of member churches in certain areas, and (iv) identifying and promoting activities which are coordinated and implemented, on behalf of the WCC as the fellowship of churches, by two, three or more churches or ecumenical partners which have specific expertise or have for good reasons particular interests for being involved.

69. These two parts in adjusting the work of the Council at the operational level are needed to strengthen its efficiency as well as its impact.

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<sup>6</sup> Minutes of the Meeting of the executive committee, p.31

70. Where are we today?

71. Leadership and staff have already started a process of refocusing the programmatic work following the adage 'do less, do it better'. The preparations for the programme plans 2010 started with a retreat of the staff executive group in which the planned major achievements of the council and focal points in the work were reviewed. This exercise and the follow up identified the need to create larger staff teams focused on a smaller number of projects to ensure a more integrated way of working. This principle has become the basis for the draft budget and plans 2010. This restructuring of projects and activities was undertaken without adjustment to the existing programme structure. We are confident that the work already started will continue and bear concrete results.

72. We are fully aware, however, that this work should not be driven exclusively by the demands of the new financial situation, but also developed in response to the results of the WCC mid-term programme evaluation report for the period 2006-2008. In this sense, I can give the assurance that the vision I have developed in this paper with regard to the roles of the council within the ecumenical movement will constitute the principal ground on which the new scenario will have to be built.

73. Finally, I can also note here that a preliminary work on possible changes in the internal management structure, enhancing efficiency at the management level, has indicated that such an exercise could result in an increase to unrestricted funds of close to CHF 1.0 million as alternative budget for 2010.

74. Therefore, with the certainty that we have already walked half-way in the path suggested by the executive committee and the awareness that we need a policy decision in order to continue dealing with extremely decisive matters for the council's future, I ask the central committee to affirm in principle this direction, for the alternative scenario to be then developed accordingly, submitted to the officers in December 2009, and brought to the executive committee in February 2010 for final decision.

75. There can be no doubt that these are important decisions with significant implications in determining the future course of the WCC. I plead with you, however, not to lose sight of the greater picture or to get bogged down in the institutional necessities and concerns. The overarching goal of the unity of the church and the multiple crises we are facing go far beyond the immediate institutional needs and concerns of the WCC. Let us always remind ourselves of the broader vision, which holds the key for the future of humanity and this world. This future has taken shape among us in Christ, in his death on the cross and resurrection. Remembering the story of Christ, the present moment is always the birthplace of the future that God holds in store for us.

76. Our concern for the future of the ecumenical movement is expressed in our commitment to young people as well as in our efforts to strengthen ecumenical formation at all levels of the church. We had brought the Bossey Ecumenical Institute and the network for Ecumenical Theological Education (ETE) together in one programme area so that synergies are discovered and both support each other. I am aware that such integration of the wonderful work that is done locally by the Ecumenical Institute and globally by the ETE network has proven to be more difficult than expected. While I am convinced of the importance of centrally coordinating the ecumenical education and formation within one programme I have nevertheless considered it advisable to have the current WCC ETE work to continue and be coordinated separately. That way Bossey will operate specifically as the Ecumenical Institute that also incorporates the lay formation elements. The organizational implications of such change will be addressed in the alternative scenario that I have outlined above. But in addressing the problems we are encountering, we should not allow the past to block solutions that will improve our work on ecumenical formation. This is what young people and future generations deserve and can expect from us.

77. Discerning this future that is always incarnated in the present moment is never the task of an individual person alone or just of an organization, but of the community of believers together with those entrusted with the responsibility of leadership and spiritual discernment. Based on my own experience, I am sure

that youth has to play a crucial role in these processes of discernment. To the young people this signifies both a challenge and a privilege: challenge because they must not be content with the *status quo*; a privilege because they can participate and contribute to the choices that we are making today that could affect their involvement in the life and work of the ecumenical movement.

78. I am grateful to God that I could support the creation of the Echos commission as a new instrument that amplifies the voice of young people in the WCC and the ecumenical movement. I suggest that we make space for representatives of the Echos commission and the young members among us to speak to the central committee following this report.

79. In closing, I wish to express my thanks to this council and this movement for the opportunities that I have been provided to exercise my ministry within the fullness of the body of Christ. There will be other occasions during the course of this central committee meeting to elaborate on our common experiences and on the many blessings, and occasional inconveniences, we have shared over the years... For now, thank you, and to God be the glory.