



Original

Document No. **GEN 04**
English

FOR INFORMATION

Update on WCC Assembly Venue Search

I. Introduction

The general secretary of the World Council of Churches (WCC) was commissioned by the WCC central committee, meeting in February 2008, to initiate the search for an adequate venue for the 10th WCC assembly, scheduled for 2013.

In April 2008, in his report to the member churches on the work of the central committee, the general secretary announced that invitations to host the 10th assembly would be warmly welcomed.

Using the same figures that guided preparation for the 9th assembly, as advised by the policy reference committee (Doc. GEN/PRC 04), churches were informed that “the ideal venue would host in one central location no fewer than 7,000 people for daily prayer, provide meeting facilities for no fewer than 5,000 people, and provide plenary space for no fewer than 2,500 people. The churches offering to host the assembly should exhibit a strong ecumenical cooperation. They should be able to offer logistical support and to ensure that both the preparations and the event are accompanied through prayer.”

Specifications for hosting the assembly were developed and shared with churches interested in hosting the assembly.

What follows is a brief report on four potential host venues for the next assembly. A second more detailed report will be presented to the central committee in August. On Thursday, 27 August from 11.00 to 12.30, the churches offering to host the assembly will present their respective invitations. After discussion in plenary, the venue selection will be referred to the policy reference committee for action. The policy reference committee is expected to recommend a venue for selection on 1 September.

II. Potential venues

In the first months of 2009 a letter of *invitation* to host the assembly was received from the churches in Korea. Letters of *interest* to explore the possibility of hosting the assembly were received from the churches in Syria and Rhodes. An additional *invitation* was received in April from Ethiopia.

III. Venue search team

Rev. Rui Bernhard, the national coordinator of the 9th assembly from Porto Alegre, Brazil, was invited as a special consultant to visit the potential venues. The venue search team also included WCC staff familiar

with assembly planning and the churches being visited. The visits to Korea, Rhodes and Damascus took place in May. The visit to Addis Ababa took place in July.¹

IV. Guiding criteria

The search team visited each location with the following criteria in mind:

1. Ecumenical spirit of the churches and their commitment to work together in hosting the assembly.
2. Logistical feasibility of hosting the assembly, including meeting space, worship space, hotels, ground transportation, access for persons with disabilities, etc.
3. Civic commitment to facilitate the assembly, including visas and other logistics.

V. Ecumenical spirit

In all four locations the churches expressed their deep interest in hosting the next WCC assembly and their commitment to work together in welcoming the fellowship of WCC member churches.

In Korea, the visit was coordinated through the National Council of Churches in Korea (NCKK) on behalf of their member churches. The team met with leaders of WCC member churches (Presbyterian, Methodist, Anglican), including the Orthodox Church in Korea. The team also met leaders of churches that are not members of the WCC, including Evangelical, Pentecostal and Roman Catholic churches. The Korean Christian Federation of North Korea expressed its support. Ms Hae-Sun Jung, WCC executive committee member, facilitated the visit, also on behalf of NCKK.

In Rhodes, the visit was coordinated through Metropolitan Cyril on behalf of the Ecumenical Patriarchate. The team met with Metropolitan Cyril frequently. The team also met with the local Roman Catholic priest and the pastors of the German and Swedish speaking Lutheran congregations. Metropolitan Gennadios of Sassima, WCC vice-moderator, facilitated the visit, also on behalf of the Ecumenical Patriarchate.

In Damascus, the visit was coordinated by the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Antioch and All the East on behalf of the WCC member churches. The team met with leaders of WCC member churches, including Greek Orthodox, Syrian Orthodox, Presbyterian (Evangelical), Armenian Orthodox and Armenian Evangelical churches. The team also met with the Greek Catholic Patriarchate of Antioch. Additionally, the team met with the Grand Mufti of Syria. Mr Samer Laham, ecumenical officer of the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Antioch, facilitated the visit.

In Addis Ababa, the visit was coordinated by the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church. The team met with the leaders of the WCC member churches in Ethiopia, including the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church, the Evangelical Ethiopian Church Mekane Yesus and the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Alexandria and All Africa. The team also met with leaders of the Catholic Church, the Kale Heywet Church (Protestant), the Meserete Kristos Church (Mennonite), the Ethiopian Full Gospel Believers Church and the Evangelical Churches Fellowship of Ethiopia. Dr Nigussu Legesse, WCC staff from the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church, facilitated the visit.

VI. Logistical feasibility

All four locations offer adequate conference, accommodation and transport facilities to host the assembly. In each location, the team visited modern conference facilities.

¹ Rev. Rui Bernhard was not able to join the staff team that visited Addis Ababa.

In Korea, the team visited the primary conference centers of Seoul and Busan. Both would provide an excellent venue for the assembly. Busan is the venue proposed by the churches. Hotels are located between 1.5 and 2.5 km from the conference centre. There is one hotel in front of the conference centre with 400 rooms. October 2013 is suggested as the best time to host the assembly.

In Rhodes, the team visited the conference facilities of two hotels that are located directly next door to each other (literally). When used together, the facilities provide an excellent venue for the assembly. Hotels are located between .5 and 1.5 km from the conference facilities. The two hotels offering conference facilities, plus a third hotel on the same compound can provide up to 1000 rooms. The last two weeks of October 2013 are suggested as the best time to host the assembly.

In Damascus, the team visited the Damascus fairgrounds and national conference centre, which are located next to each other (.5 km distance). Either the fairgrounds or the conference centre would provide an excellent venue for the assembly. Hotels are located about 15 km from the conference facilities in downtown Damascus. There are a significant number of meeting venues located within walking distance of the hotels for evening programmes. There is one hotel connected to the conference centre with 400 rooms. September 2013 is suggested as the best time to host the assembly.

In Addis Ababa, the team visited the United Nations Conference Center and adjoining Africa Hall; and also the Millennium Hall. The Conference Center and Africa Hall provide an excellent venue for the assembly. Hotels are located within a .5 and 5 km from the conference facilities. There are many hotels under construction in the same area. September 2013 is suggested as the best time to host the assembly.

VII. Civic commitment

In all four locations the delegation met with appropriate civic leaders. In each case the local or national government expressed strong support for hosting the assembly.

In Korea, the team met the Minister of Tourism, the convention bureaus and the vice-mayors of both Seoul and Busan.

In Rhodes, the team met with a representative of the Dodecanese magistrate and the vice-mayor of Rhodes. The team also met the mayors of Rhodes and Lindos during a local festival.

In Syria, the team met with the Ministers of Tourism, Transport, Information, Health, Telecommunication and Industry. The team also met with the director of protocol for the office of the president.

In Addis Ababa, the team met with Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Mayor's Office of Addis Ababa and the President of Ethiopia.

VIII. Finances

Though costing the assembly is an important exercise, it may be premature to present a scenario of the least expensive to the most expensive venue locations, particularly as the variance would be limited. Additionally, it is difficult to estimate travel, accommodation and rental fees more than four years in advance.

However, it is possible to affirm that an assembly can be planned in any of the four locations using approximately the same amount of resources as were invested for the Porto Alegre assembly (7.0 million CHF). In each location, the churches expressed their readiness to explore possibilities for mobilizing local resources, including government and local businesses, to cover direct costs.

Once a venue is selected, it will be necessary to prepare a detailed budget and to negotiate the hosts' direct contribution toward assembly expenses. Careful management of the budget will ensure that the assembly spending is kept within the limits set.