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FOR ACTION

Report on WCC Assembly Venue Search

I. Mandate

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.

The member churches were advised 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.

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.

II. Invitations and letters of interest

A letter of *invitation* to host the assembly was received from the churches in Korea. The National Council of Churches in Korea (NCKK) coordinated the invitation on behalf of all NCKK member churches, including the four WCC member churches in Korea – the Anglican Church of Korea, the Korean Methodist Church, the Presbyterian Church of Korea and the Presbyterian Church in the Republic of Korea.

A letter of *interest* to explore the possibility of hosting the assembly on the Island of Rhodes was received from the Ecumenical Patriarchate in cooperation with the Metropolitanate of Rhodes (Greece).

Letters of *invitation* to host the assembly were received from churches in Syria, including WCC member churches – the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Antioch and All the East, the Syrian Orthodox Patriarchate of Antioch and All the East, the National Evangelical Synod of Syria and Lebanon, the Armenian Evangelical Community in Syria; and also from the Greek Catholic Patriarchate of Antioch and All the East, of Alexandria and Jerusalem.

A letter of *invitation* to host the assembly in Addis Ababa was received from His Holiness Abune Paulos on behalf of the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church.

III. 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.

IV. Appreciating the visits

Each of the four locations meets the basic criteria for hosting the assembly in terms of ecumenical spirit, logistical feasibility and civic commitment. Each location also presents particular strengths and challenges in hosting the assembly.

Most importantly each potential venue offers a unique context that will inevitably shape the theme, nature and witness of the next assembly.

The venue search team did not “score” the different locations, noting that the selection of the venue for the next assembly is not a competition, but a process of discernment.

At this time in the life of the fellowship of member churches and at this time in the history of the *oikoumene*, which location might best strengthen the unity of the fellowship and of the churches’ common witness to the world?

What follows is a review of the visit to each of the four potential assembly venues. It is presented on behalf of the assembly venue visit team.

It should be noted that each visit offered an occasion for fellowship, prayer and sharing with the churches. In each location the team spent significant time with church and ecumenical leaders. The generous hospitality offered by the churches and their partners is deeply appreciated.

A. Busan, Korea – visited from 14 to 17 May

Ecumenical Spirit

The NCKK and the churches in Korea are extremely eager to host the next assembly. The spirit of ecumenical cooperation and the desire to work together to host the assembly is very strong. Working together to host the assembly is seen as a way of deepening the existing fellowship of the churches in Korea. The churches reported that in addition to the support of NCKK member churches, which include churches that are not members of the WCC, the Catholic Bishop’s Conference and the Council of Churches in Korea, which is an evangelical fellowship, welcome the assembly. The Korean Christian Federation in North Korea also supports the invitation. The potential and commitment to involve local congregations in support of the assembly is significant. In addition the churches in Korea hope to involve the wider fellowship of member churches in North East Asia in hosting the assembly and sharing the particular witness of the church in this part of the world.

The visit was coordinated by WCC executive committee member Ms Hae-Sun Jung on behalf of the National Council of Churches in Korea (NCKK) and their member churches. The venue search team included Rev. Rui Bernhard (consultant), Mr Douglas Chial (WCC staff) and Rev. Dr Jooseop Keum (WCC staff). The four-day visit provided an opportunity to meet with the leaders and representatives of the WCC member churches in Korea (Anglican, Presbyterian and Methodist) and also with the Catholic Church, Orthodox Church, Evangelical and Pentecostal churches.

Logistical feasibility

The team visited two possible venues in two different cities – the primary conference centres in Seoul and Busan. Seoul is the capital of South Korea and has a population of 10+ million people. Busan, located on the southeast coast of the Korean peninsula is the second largest city in South Korea with a population of 4+ million people. The churches have chosen to present Busan as the best possible venue to host the assembly in Korea.

The Busan Exhibition and Convention Centre (BEXCO) is a modern facility located in downtown Busan. The venue offers all of the facilities and space needed for plenary, worship, meetings of various sizes and includes ample technical support and interpretation equipment. Worship could either be held indoors in a transformed exhibition hall, or there is a large parking lot without lampposts or trees on which a worship tent could be pitched. The BEXCO management provides assistance with all sub-contracted services that might be needed.

The plenary space at BEXCO is a particularly flexible exhibition hall that can be divided and adapted to any size or configuration needed (26,400 meters square space with no pillars). A new auditorium seating 4000 people in theatre style will be completed in 2012.

The venue offers catering services and has several restaurants offering a wide variety of food. The venue is located next to the largest shopping mall in Asia, which offers dozens more restaurants. A free choice option for meals, using commercial facilities would be most simple. There are a number of medical facilities in close proximity.

The venue would provide an excellent home for the assembly with professional conference support and management. There is an attractive space outside the building where activities could also take place. The entire venue would be needed to host the assembly, i.e. other events would not run concurrently.

There are a number of 3, 4 and 5 star hotels between 1.5 and 2.5 kilometres from the convention centre. The hotels are located along the same beach-front area. Though shuttle services would be needed between the hotels and the convention centre, most hotels are at a 15-30 minute walk from the venue.

There is one hotel with 400 rooms directly facing the convention centre. There is also a youth hostel located near the venue. A rough estimation of negotiated prices in 2009 for a single room with breakfast ranges from 50 to 100 USD per night.

The international airport servicing Busan is located outside the city, requiring 45 to 60 minutes by car or bus. There are direct connections from the Incheon airport, which is the primary international airport in South Korea. The onward flight to Busan is about one hour. A number of regional hubs have direct connections to Busan, i.e. Singapore, Bangkok, Tokyo, etc.

Civic commitment

The venue search team met with the minister for culture and tourism, which is also the ministry concerned with religious affairs. The minister welcomed the assembly offering support. The minister was asked to offer special assistance to secure the necessary travel documents for assembly participants, particularly those participants living in countries where there is no South Korean embassy.

The team met with the vice-mayors of both Seoul and Busan. In each case the mayor's office promised its full support to the assembly. The vice-mayor of Busan offered special assistance with travel and accommodation.

The team also met with the tourist boards of both Seoul and Busan. In each case the tourist boards can offer significant services and modest financial incentives if their city is selected.

Unique features of an assembly in Busan

There are a number of unique features that would characterize an assembly in Busan, Korea. These include:

- The churches in Korea and North East Asia – the life and witness of the churches, their particular history, experience of unity, style of worship and commitment to peace and justice.
- The centrality of mission in the life of the church – many of the churches in Korea were planted by European and North American missionaries and have now become mission-sending churches.
- The hope for a reunified Korean peninsula – the churches are deeply involved in efforts to re-unite the Korean people and the Korean peninsula.
- The inter-religious context – about 25% of the Korean people are Christian and the rest of the population is Buddhist or follows a traditional belief system.
- The strength of the local congregation – the congregations are active, growing and play a central role in the life of the national churches.
- The phenomenon of the mega-church – Korea is home to many mega-churches, including world's largest Pentecostal and Presbyterian congregations.
- A post-ideological ecumenical landscape – the divide between “ecumenical and evangelical” is considerably less apparent in Korea than in other countries.

An assembly in Busan, Korea would draw attention to Christianity in North East Asia; mission in the life of the church; peace and reconciliation for the Korean peninsula; inter-religious dialogue in a North East Asian context; congregational vitality and new horizons for a broad ecumenical movement. The best time to host an assembly in Busan is October 2013.

B. Rhodes, Greece – visited from 17 to 21 May

Ecumenical spirit

The Metropolitanate of Rhodes, on behalf of the Ecumenical Patriarchate, would warmly welcome hosting the next assembly. The welcome is offered as a humble gift, from one member of the same body to the other members of the same body, should the fellowship of churches elect to meet in Rhodes. Though the majority of Christians in Rhodes are Orthodox, there is also a Catholic parish and a number of Lutheran parishes, which are German, Swedish and Norwegian speaking. The church leaders all reported a strong sense of unity within the church in Rhodes. This was presented as great strength both to the churches and for the assembly should it be held in Rhodes.

WCC vice-moderator, H.E. Metropolitan Gennadios of Sassima, on behalf of the Ecumenical Patriarchate, facilitated the visit to Rhodes. The venue search team included Rev. Rui Bernhard (consultant) and Mr Douglas Chial (WCC staff). The three-day visit allowed for a number of discussions with H.E. Cyril of Rhodes. The team was welcomed many times at the bishop's home and invited to join him for the liturgical celebration of the feast of Saints Constantine and Helen. The team also met the Catholic and Lutheran parish leaders and many priests and deacons from the Metropolitanate.

Logistical feasibility

Rhodes is one of the largest Greek islands with a population of 120,000. It is also a major tourist destination, welcoming hundreds of thousands of people each year. The team visited two possible venues in Rhodes – the Rhodos Palace Hotel and the Capsis Hotel, which are two of the principle conference sites in all of Greece. The two conference sites are located directly next door to each other.

Together, both conference sites offer all of the facilities and space needed for plenary, worship and meetings of every size. The hotels offer technical support and interpretation equipment. Worship would be held under a large dome with a transparent roof, which normally covers a swimming pool and banquet

area. The pool could be covered, sloped seating installed and the perimeter of dome removed for greater accessibility. The space could host up to 3000 people.

There are two options for a plenary hall. The larger room, at the Capsis Hotel, could seat a maximum of 1000 at tables with free seating for up to 1000 in theatre style on the ground floor and mezzanine balcony. A balcony circles the entire perimeter of the plenary floor. The floor and mezzanine space represent a total of 2,130 square metres.

The two venues have numerous restaurants offering buffet and *à la carte* menus, which are able to seat up to 2000 persons at one time. In addition there are many restaurants within walking distance.

The venues are located on the beach in Ixia, 5 km from the town of Rhodes. The two conference hotels and a third hotel on the same site can together offer at least 1000 rooms, 4 and 5 star rooms. In Ixia there are a number of 3, 4 and 5 star hotels that are all within walking distance from the conference site. An estimation of negotiated prices in 2009 for a single room with breakfast is from 50 to 120 Euros per day.

There are a number of possible excursions and pilgrimages available in Rhodes, to neighbouring islands, such as Patmos and also to Turkey. There are some shopping facilities nearby and public buses and taxis for excursions to town of Rhodes. The Rhodes hospital is located near the conference site.

The venue and nearby hotels are a 15 minute drive from the Rhodes airport. Rhodes can be reached through Athens, but also directly from many European cities including London, Rome, Berlin, Stockholm, Vienna, etc.

The venue would provide an excellent home for the assembly with professional conference support and management. The close proximity between venues and accommodation sites means participants are within walking distance of all daily events.

Civic commitment

The search team met with representatives of the Dodecanese magistrate and the vice-mayor of Rhodes. Both the regional and local governments welcome the assembly in Rhodes and noted the islands' experience in hosting many hundreds of thousands of people. The team also met the mayors of Rhodes and Lindos, with other civic leaders during a local festival with hundreds of local people.

Assistance in obtaining visas should be discussed with the Athens government, but Greece and other Schengen countries are well represented around the world.

The team also met with a number of tour operators ready to arrange hotel bookings, ground transportation, and assistance with special events, pilgrimages or tours.

It is worth noting that local businesses and tourism services are fluent in English and other languages.

Unique observations about an assembly in Rhodes

There are a number of unique features that would characterize an assembly in Rhodes, Greece. These include:

- The Orthodox Church in context – the life and ministry of the church, the spirituality of the church, the history and survival of the church in a place as ancient as Rhodes.
- Rhodes has been an historic crossroads of peoples and cultures for thousands of years. Though it is considered Europe, it sits on the edge of the Middle East.
- Rhodes shares in the spiritual history of the early church. St Paul passed through Lindos and St John wrote his Gospel account on the nearby island of Patmos.
- The main coast of Turkey is visible from the shore of Rhodes and people move freely back and forth from Greece to Turkey, two countries still yearning for peace and reconciliation.

- The inter-religious context – though the Muslim population is relatively small, Rhodes remains an important centre for the preservation of Islamic culture and history.
- A very local assembly – Rhodes is a small place – with a friendly population accustomed to welcoming foreigners and full of life.

An assembly on the Island of Rhodes, Greece, would draw attention to the local church; Orthodox spirituality; peace and reconciliation between Greece and Turkey; the history of the ancient church and its survival through many centuries. The best time to host an assembly in Rhodes would be the last half of October 2013, during the low season for tourism, but while charter flights are still available.

C. Damascus, Syria – visited from 24 to 29 May

Ecumenical commitment

The churches in Syria are particularly eager to host the next assembly, which would be the first assembly in this region of the world. A strong ecumenical commitment was expressed when the leaders of the many different Orthodox, Catholic and Protestant churches in Syria came together in support of hosting the next assembly in Damascus at the invitation of H.B. Ignatius IV of the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Antioch and All the East. The churches' broadly ecumenical interest in hosting the assembly is not only to strengthen their own presence in the country, which is diminishing, but also to welcome the fellowship of churches to the Holy city of Damascus.

In addition to the churches' support, the Grand Mufti of Syria expressed his support for an assembly in Damascus on behalf of the Muslim community in the country.

The visit was coordinated by Mr Samer Laham, the ecumenical officer of the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Antioch and All the East. The venue search team included Rev. Rui Bernhard (consultant), Fr Daniel Buda (WCC staff) and Mr Douglas Chial (WCC staff). The four-day visit provided opportunity to meet with leaders of WCC member churches in Syria, including the Greek Orthodox, Syrian Orthodox, Presbyterian (Evangelical), Armenian Orthodox and Armenian Evangelical churches. The team also met with H.B. Gregorius III of the Greek Melkite Patriarchate of Antioch.

Logistical feasibility

Damascus is a large city of 3.5 million inhabitants. The team visited two possible venues outside the city of Damascus – the Damascus Fairgrounds and the National Conference Palace. The two facilities are located next to each other (.5 km). Either the fairgrounds or the conference centre alone would provide an excellent venue for the assembly. The facilities could also be combined, but it is not necessary.

Both locations offer all of the facilities and space needed for plenary, worship and meetings of every size. They both offer technical support and the conference centre is equipped with an interpretation system.

The Damascus Fairgrounds has numerous flexible exhibition spaces spread across an open-air campus. The venue offers over 60,000 square meters of covered space, including four 3000 square meter exhibition halls, which could be used for plenary and worship. Worship could also be held beneath one of the existing tents. In addition there is ample space for all types of meetings, offices and exhibition space. Catering would be needed and there is ample space for serving. There are onsite medical facilities.

The National Conference Palace offers four floors of meeting spaces and numerous auditoriums all connected to a central plenary hall. It offers a three-level fixed seat plenary hall, with built-in interpretation equipment, that can seat 700 at tables and 1200 in theatre style – on three levels. The facility offers three large theatres (350 to 450 people), five small theatres (100 to 200) all with built-in interpretation equipment. In addition it offers all other rooms needed for various meetings and offices. Exhibition space

could be indoors or outdoors. A worship tent would need to be pitched over an adjoining parking lot. There is an onsite medical clinic.

The Conference Palace is connected to the Ebla Cham Hotel, which has 400 rooms, two large ballrooms, smaller meeting rooms and two restaurants. The restaurants can seat 700 people at one time. The ballrooms could be converted to dining rooms to seat another 1000 people at one time.

Hotels are located about 15 km from the conference facilities in downtown Damascus where there are a number of 3, 4 and 5 star hotels centrally located. The hotels are at walking distance from the national library, the opera house and the Damascus University where many evening programmes could be held. There are also many church guest houses that could accommodate participants and likewise many church halls for evening programmes.

Many new hotels are currently under construction. The un-negotiated price in 2009 for a single room with breakfast ranges from 50 to 150 Euros per night, with international hotels charging international rates.

Organized transportation between accommodation and meeting venues would be necessary. Dinner should be taken at the hotels or surrounding restaurants. At least 30 to 45 minutes is needed to move the assembly each way.

The Damascus airport is located 30 km from the city. Damascus can be reached through many major hubs in Europe and the Middle East. Passports with an entry/exit stamp from Israel cannot be used to enter Syria (discussions will be held so that WCC can be fully assured that all participants to the assembly will be allowed into the country).

Civic commitment

The team had official meetings with the ministers of telecommunication, tourism, information and health. The team also met with the ministers of transportation and Industry. Each minister expressed a strong desire that Syria be selected and offered the help of their ministry to assure the success of the meeting. For example, the ministry of tourism is prepared to facilitate negotiations with hotels; the ministry of transport is ready to assist with daily shuttles and flight discounts on Syrian Air.

The team also met with the director of protocol for the office of the president. The director reiterated the full support of the president's office and offered the assistance of the government to facilitate the meeting in any way. The team specifically requested assistance in obtaining visas, especially for participants from countries where Syria might not have an embassy. The director promised support for visas, including visas on arrival. He also offered to assist in negotiating hotel prices.

Unique observations about an assembly in Damascus

There are a number of unique features that would characterize an assembly in Damascus Syria. These include:

- Importance of Damascus as Holy Land, cradle of Christianity, the place of Saul's conversion, and the appearance of Christ and early ministry of St Paul.
- Damascus is the seat of three patriarchates and an ancient home to many Christian traditions, including Eastern Orthodox, Oriental Orthodox, Latin Catholic, Roman Catholic, and also home to newer traditions.
- Bearing witness to the life, spirituality and particular concerns of the churches in the Middle East.
- Deep concern for peace and reconciliation in the Middle East and the WCC fellowship of churches' commitment to being peacemakers in the region.
- This would help mark the end of the WCC special focus on the Middle East (between the Porto Alegre assembly and the next assembly).
- Inter-religious context – Syria is 98% Muslim. Both Christians and Muslims share a common testimony of living peacefully and in harmony.

- It would be an assembly offering many bridges to the world, particularly between East and West; between Christians and Muslims.

An assembly in Damascus, Syria, would draw attention to the importance of Damascus in the history of the church; the concern to strengthen the witness of Christianity in the Middle East; the life and spirituality of the ancient church; the imperative for peace and reconciliation in the Middle East; and the testimony of Christians and Muslims living together in harmony. It would be the first assembly to be held in the Middle East. The best time to host an assembly in Damascus is September 2013.

D. Addis Ababa, Ethiopia – visited 21 to 24 July

Ecumenical commitment

The churches in Ethiopia warmly welcome the possibility of hosting the next assembly under the invitation of H.H. Abune Paulos of the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church. Strong support for hosting the assembly was expressed by the leaders of the Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus, also a WCC member church; by the Ethiopia Evangelical Churches Fellowship, which represents 31 different churches, and by the Greek Orthodox Metropolitan, the Roman Catholic Archbishop, the Kale Heywet Church (Protestant), the Meserete Kristos Church (Mennonite) and the Ethiopian Full Gospel Believers Church.

The churches have a strong history of working together in the area of development. Hosting the assembly is considered an opportunity to deepen the fellowship among the churches in Ethiopia, possibly leading them closer to establishing a national council under the leadership of the Ethiopian Orthodox Patriarchate.

The visit was coordinated by the Patriarchate of the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church. The venue search team included Dr Nigussu Legesse, who was elected to the central committee in 2006 and recently began service as WCC staff, and Mr Douglas Chial (WCC staff). The visit was an opportunity to meet the leaders of a number of churches that are not members of the WCC ranging in size from 5 to 7.5 million members. The churches in Ethiopia are proudly indigenized and many look to the Orthodox Church as a “mother” church.

Logistical feasibility

The team visited a variety of venues in Addis Ababa, which would all need to be used to host the assembly. Addis Ababa is the capital of Ethiopia and has a population of 3.5 million people. The city hosts the African Union (AU), the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) and counts more embassies than any other city in Africa.

The primary venue for plenary and other meetings would be the United Nations Conference Centre, which is a modern facility located in the centre of Addis Ababa. The venue offers most of the facilities and space needed for plenary, meetings of various sizes, and includes ample technical support and interpretation equipment. Dining facilities can seat up to 750 people at once and other space can be converted for serving meals. The Sheraton Hotel is the exclusive caterer of food and beverages.

The UN centre has two large conference halls equipped with fixed seating, tables for delegation heads and built-in interpretation equipment. One of the halls seats 800 and the other hall seats 500. They can be joined together by video streaming for simultaneous use. There are a limited number of additional meeting rooms with fixed seating (4 for 114 and 10 for 20 persons). Also located in the same compound is the Africa Hall, which seats 300 people and has built in interpretation equipment.

The UN centre and Africa hall venues would provide an excellent home for the assembly plenary and meeting activities with professional conference support and management. A larger conference centre is

being built for the African Union and is expected to open in 2012 for the 50th anniversary of the AU in 2013.

Worship would take place at another site – the Millennium Hall, which is 5 km from the UN conference centre. The space is a covered pavilion that can seat tens of thousands of people. The surrounding exhibition grounds and parking lot could be converted for Bible study groups.

There are a number of 3, 4 and 5 star hotels between .5 and 5 km kilometres from the UN conference centre and Millennium hall. The largest hotel has 400 rooms and banquet hall that can seat 800. There are many new hotels under construction – 1000 rooms were built in the first half of 2009. A rough estimate of negotiated prices in 2009 for a single room with breakfast ranges from 80 to 110 USD per night.

The Addis Ababa airport is located about 15 km from the UN conference centre and most hotels. The airport, UN conference centre, Millennium hall and hotels are located in the same burrow of Addis Ababa, which is called Bole.

Civic commitment

The venue search team met personally with the president of Ethiopia who strongly encouraged the WCC to meet in Ethiopia in 2013. The team also met with the ministry of foreign affairs, which promised support in facilitating visas, including the existing visa upon arrival at the Bole airport. H.H. Abune Paulos also informed the ministries of tourism, health and information, as well as to the prime minister's office that the delegation was visiting.

The team met with the office of the mayor of Addis Ababa, which offered full cooperation in hosting the assembly and pointed to Addis Ababa's experience in hosting many large and important conferences such as the annual African Leaders Summit which gathers 4000 people.

Unique observations about an assembly in Addis Ababa

There are a number of unique features that would characterize an assembly in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. These include:

- The unique experience of the church coming to Ethiopia – The pre-Christian Semitic roots of the people, the baptism of the Ethiopian eunuch and the growth of a national church since 34 AD.
- The amazing story of the church in Ethiopia, its survival over thousands of years, the rich monastic tradition of the Orthodox church, the extraordinary devotion of the faithful, the Orthodox culture and spirituality.
- The holy wonders of Ethiopia – the Arc of the Covenant, a portion of the True Cross, stone-hewed churches and other sites of pilgrimage.
- An independent spirit – Ethiopia was never colonized and played a key role in supporting national independence throughout the continent. The spirit of pride in independence can be felt strongly among the churches.
- The African context – Ethiopia, as the capital of inter-African diplomacy, plays an important role in the concerns of Africa for justice, peace, stability and development.
- The inter-religious context – more than one-third of the population in Ethiopia is Muslim and borders many predominately Muslim countries.

An assembly in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, would draw attention to the ancient experience of the church in Africa; the unique witness and spirituality of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church; the spirit of African independence and future of the African Union; the pressing concerns of the continent, including peace and reconciliation, poverty and health, justice and development. The best time to host an assembly in Addis Ababa is September 2013, culminating with the feast of the True Cross.

V. 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.

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 (7.5 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.

For example, a rough and un-negotiated estimate at current prices for the cost of travel, room and board for the approximately 350 delegates normally subsidized by the WCC ranges from 850,000 CHF to 1,100,000 CHF. This estimation is less than the amount budgeted for the same expenses of the Porto Alegre Assembly, which was 1,200,000 CHF.

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 income available.

VI. Closing remarks

In each place, the opportunity of hosting the assembly would greatly strengthen the existing fellowship among the local churches. And each potential host church is eager to share its blessings with the entire WCC fellowship. But, in each venue the churches face a similar challenge to involve local parishes in preparing and welcoming the assembly. Cultivating the involvement of local Christians is a essential for a successful assembly.

The search team is confident that each of the potential venues is capable of hosting a great assembly. Each location offers a modern conference facility and adequate support. Each venue also presents particular logistical challenges such as language barriers, distances between venues, size constraints. In each case these can be overcome by planning the assembly to "fit" within the culture and venue selected.

In each of the potential host countries both local and national governments are motivated to assist the churches in hosting the assembly. All the governments are ready to facilitate visas and provide other services. It will be important to work closely with the respective host government to ensure smooth running of the assembly and the transparency of its work.

Ultimately the choice of venue is a matter for discernment. Each of the past assemblies was shaped by the context in which it met – shaped by the witness of the host churches, the concerns and hopes of the local people and the events taking place around the world at that time.

The next assembly, its theme and message to the world, will be shaped by the context in which it meets.

Appendix 01 – Previous assemblies

First assembly

Place: Amsterdam, Netherlands

Dates: 22 August to 4 September 1948

Theme: Man's Disorder and God's Design

Member churches: 147

Second assembly

Place: Evanston, Illinois, United States of America

Dates: 15-31 August 1954

Theme: Christ – the Hope of the World

Member churches: 161

Third assembly

Place: New Delhi, India

Dates: 19 November to 5 December 1961

Theme: Jesus Christ – the Light of the World

Member churches: 197

Fourth assembly

Place: Uppsala, Sweden

Dates: 4-20 July, 1968

Theme: Behold, I make all things new

Member churches: 235

Fifth assembly

Place: Nairobi, Kenya

Dates: 23 November to 10 December 1975

Theme: Jesus Christ Frees and Unites

Member churches: 285

Sixth assembly

Place: Vancouver, Canada

Dates: 24 July to 10 August 1983

Theme: Jesus Christ – the Life of the World

Member churches: 301

Seventh assembly

Place: Canberra, Australia

Dates: 7-20 February 1991

Theme: Come, Holy Spirit – Renew the Whole Creation

Member churches: 317

Eighth assembly

Place: Harare, Zimbabwe

Dates: 3-14 December 1998

Theme: Turn to God – Rejoice in Hope

Member churches: 336

Ninth assembly

Place: Porto Alegre, Brazil

Dates: 14-23 February 2006

Theme: God, in Your Grace, Transform the World

Member churches: 348