



Original

Document No. **GEN/PRO 07**  
**English**

FOR ACTION

## Report of the programme committee

### RECOMMENDATIONS

- 1 That central committee affirm the four key roles for the programme work outlined in paragraph 6 of the report, and ask the general secretary and senior staff to use these as criteria in fulfilling the programme work.
- 2 That central committee acknowledge the unsustainability of the present programme plans, and ask the general secretary and senior management to continue, in consultation with the core group of the programme committee, their work of reorganizing and restructuring the programme work in a way that pursues the objectives set by the assembly while making it sustainable in terms both of finance and staff capacity.
- 3 That central committee recall the criteria adopted at the last assembly, and affirm that these should be used as core criteria in any restructuring. These are:
  - to keep the focus on what the WCC uniquely might do as a global fellowship of churches in providing leadership to the whole of the ecumenical movement;
  - to do less, to do it well, in an integrated, collaborative and interactive approach;
  - to lift up its central task of the churches calling one another to visible unity;
  - to keep in tension the work of dialogue and advocacy, of building relationships and promoting social witness among churches and with different sectors in society;
  - to foster greater ownership and participation by the churches;
  - to bring a prophetic voice and witness to the world in addressing the urgent and turbulent issues of our times in a focused way;
  - to communicate WCC activities to the churches and the world in a timely and imaginative way.
- 4 That central committee take note of the affirmations and recommendations on the specific programme areas.
- 5 That central committee affirm the continuing mandate of the programme committee core group, and authorize the executive committee to appoint, from among members of the programme committee, to vacancies when they occur.

## NARRATIVE

- 1 The committee received the report of the core group, and noted the documents it had considered, especially the very well-prepared report from the staff. Documents before the committee were:
- Report of the core group (Doc. No. GEN/PRO 06)
  - Programme report 2008-2009 (Doc. No. GEN 06)
  - Accountability report on implementation of the central committee's decisions (Doc. No. GEN/PRO 05)
  - Reports from commissions and joint consultative bodies (Doc. No. GEN/PRO 02)
  - Programme activity plans summary for 2009-2013 (Doc. No. GEN/PRO 05)

### The role of the committee

- 2 It had been affirmed that the committee's role was one of governance, not management. The committee felt the distinction between the roles still needed further clarification. The meeting agreed that on this occasion it would adopt the approach that focuses on setting the broad styles and policies of work rather than the approach that expects a more detailed review and approval of programme plans, and would then review how successful that had been. The view was expressed that the governance role is easier to fulfil when staff present options, supported by argument, rather than when discussion is left very open. The core group agreed to consider this with staff ahead of the next meeting of central committee.
- 3 In introducing the programme work, staff made it clear that the present programme plans were unsustainable. Further financial savings – ideally half a million Swiss francs – were needed, and staff were stretched to the limit already. Staff and committee concurred that the committee's task was not to identify the minutiae of savings, but to help the staff develop the criteria that would enable them to see where the priorities should lie.

### Clarifying the role of programme work

- 4 With that understanding, and using as a starting point the staff's own list of the roles they saw the programme work as playing, the committee proceeded to identify the key roles they wanted to see future WCC programme work play. A process was followed which began in small groups then sought to develop a consensus in the whole meeting in the light of the small groups' reports.
- 5 From that process the committee identified four key roles, then sought to enrich its understanding of them. It stressed that they are key roles for the programme work, not for the whole life of the WCC, the principal role of which continues to be seeking unity together. The roles the programme work plays are subservient to that task.
- 6 The four roles identified were:
- 6.1 **Convening.** It is the task of the WCC to bring together people from churches, agencies, ecumenical bodies and other organizations, and provide a space where – depending on the issues around which people have been convened – fellowship can be deepened, coalitions formed, common minds be reached. The term “convening” is at times too strong, as often it is a matter of inviting and hoping – the WCC has no power to require people to respond. The priority in such “convening” is likely to be:
- a) Where there is room for serious theological and spiritual reflection – the thing that should be the key note in all of the work of the WCC and that the WCC does best;

- b) Where choosing the theme around which to convene people is itself a prophetic act, signalling what we understand as the priorities of the kingdom of God – including response to the marginalised, vulnerable and those whose voices are ignored;
- c) Where the “convening” will contribute to our discernment of the call to and gift of unity.

Such a convening role, as distinct from an operational one, requires staff with networking and communication skills more than it requires subject specialists. The latter can often be engaged from the staffs of the churches. But WCC cannot leave itself with only networkers on its staff. Its credibility also requires it to have a number of people who are acknowledged specialists in their field.

- 6.2 **Developing partnerships.** The WCC is not the only actor in the fields of concern with which it engages: there are other local churches, ecumenical bodies, specialized agencies, secular bodies and also those Christian organizations that are outside the membership of the WCC. Increasingly we see the WCC as working in partnerships and coalitions with others.

One form of such partnerships is working in partnership with its own member churches. We would challenge churches to be willing to make the time and expertise of their staffs available to the wider fellowship through partnerships with the WCC; a smaller staff at WCC needs that sense of being part of a wider network of resources. Such partnerships increase the ownership of the WCC's work by the churches concerned.

Other partnerships mean working with those who have their own agendas and their own image to promote, that may only partly overlap with that of the WCC. Such partnerships are still well worthwhile, but WCC cannot afford to permit others to speak on its behalf in a way that implies they are speaking for the WCC. Clear understandings of the limits of the partnership and the conditions under which anyone may speak for it must be part of any partnership agreement.

- 6.3 **Education/Communication.** The group struggled to articulate what it wanted, recognizing that it was seeking to give flesh to the constitutional aim of “developing ecumenical consciousness”. The word “communication” is heard differently by different people, and can sound as though it is concerned mainly with image and profile. That is not how the committee understands it. The committee discerned that there were at least three elements involved:

- a) Communication *from* the WCC, so that the right documents reach the right people without giving the impression that the WCC is a paper factory.
- b) The process *within* churches of receiving the work of the WCC, and how the WCC itself can best facilitate that.
- c) Ecumenical education of those who lead the churches, so that they *think* ecumenically and instinctively *work* ecumenically – and don't just add a few ecumenical things on top of their ordinary work and thinking.

All three are questions for the churches as well as for the WCC, but the WCC is the body that has the greatest stake in ensuring they are handled, so they are necessarily a major role for the WCC.

- 6.4 **Advocacy and accompaniment.** This role follows from the reality of the fellowship, where each feels the other's pain and responds in love. It can take several forms. Sometimes accompaniment, standing *with* the other, is the key. Sometimes speaking out, standing *for* the other, is the key. Often advocacy requires partnerships and coalitions, for we are stronger together. This is another point where the prophetic nature of the WCC is given expression.
- 7 The committee reflected further on the implications of what it was saying. Different stories were shared about the reception of WCC documents. From some came the news that they were invaluable for use in theological education. Others responded that elsewhere they were little used, even more so when not available in the local language. Concern was expressed as to whether the prophetic role of the WCC was given sufficient prominence; in a style of work that put precedence on convening and coalition building it becomes harder to have the prophetic edge that has been a hallmark of WCC work.
- 8 Staff were asked how they would respond if given these four as the priority roles they should play. The initial response was a welcome for greater clarity in role that would provide staff with criteria to use as they reshape the programme work for the challenging period ahead.
- 9 The committee was clear that it had so far discussed how work should be done, but the content of what should be done remained to be considered. In broad terms, the direction of the programme work was set by the assembly, and the assembly guidelines continue to steer the themes and issues being tackled. In practical terms, however, that still leaves considerable flexibility.

### **The implications for programme work**

- 10 The committee divided into sub-groups to consider the implications of this focus on four priority roles for each programme area. This was the point at which the committee began to engage with the content of the programme work. It noted that the term "programme" actually includes activities of quite different kinds. Some work involves supporting commissions with a long history and a continually evolving agenda. Some involves limited-term projects. One project area – P5 – involves the work of an educational institution. Others are run by small staff teams in the ecumenical centre. The shape their work will take will necessarily differ.
- 11 The committee accepted the reports of the sub-groups for passing on to central committee. The committee did not have time to consider each in detail, so committee members who were not in the relevant sub-group are not bound by these recommendations.
- 12 **P1 The WCC and the ecumenical movement in the 21<sup>st</sup> century**

The group noted that the convening role, which is often a role that only the WCC can play, takes different form according to the issues. It includes facilitating, initiating, inviting and providing space.

In forming partnerships, the key is to identify the areas where there are shared vision and goals on a particular theme, as happens on combating violence. The WCC can initiate partnerships/coalitions, for instance of women's organizations. The WCC's own commissions are potential partners in developing an expanded space.

The group gave some time to issues of education and communication. It urged a strengthening of the work with youth and women's organizations as an important element in improving communication. The capacity of members of central committee to act as communicators and educators needs strengthening, so they can share in informing and raising awareness among church

members. The WCC needs to be visible if it is to witness to visible unity. Strengthening the Ecumenical Officers' Network is another way of deepening communication.

On advocacy, the group reminds the central committee of the Lund principle: "Churches should act together in all matters except those in which deep differences of conviction compel them to act separately."

The group struggled with the request to identify priorities, as it felt the way the system works gives insufficient background information for fulfilment of the role of a governing body. It noted, however, that the call for consultation on programme work, while right and to be affirmed, has to be set alongside the need to review programmes for stewardship purposes. Consultation does not replace accountability for governance or management.

### 13 **P2 Unity, mission, evangelism and spirituality**

In the view of the group, there are three criteria for assigning priorities to programme work:

1<sup>st</sup> priority: work only the WCC can do (e.g. Faith and Order commission and the commission on World Mission and Evangelism)

2<sup>nd</sup> priority: if the WCC can do it well – i.e. if others are doing it well why would we duplicate it?

3<sup>rd</sup> priority: all work must be seen through a theological lens.

The group applied these criteria as well as the criteria of the four roles in order to prioritise the work of P2. While it was clear that partnership was the normal mode for P2 work, it reached the conclusion that the Faith and Order commission and the commission on World Mission and Evangelism both rank high on all criteria and are the two priorities in this programme area. The present programme structure hides them from view; they need to be given a higher profile. The group recommends that they be made more visible.

P2 staff together with communication are to be responsible for communicating with member churches, and member churches with their constituency.

### 14 **P3 Public Witness: addressing power and affirming peace**

Aware that the overall criterion concerns calling one another to visible unity, the group asked first whether this is translated into public witness. This took priority over any of the four roles.

Applying the four roles, however, led the group to identify priorities as follows:

- 1 The Middle East focus, including the Palestine-Israel Forum and the EAPPI programme. This is a good example of convening, partnership and accompaniment.
- 2 The International Ecumenical Peace Convocation, which reflects the convening and partnership roles, together with the follow-up process towards the next assembly, which brings in education. The Ecumenical Declaration on Just Peace provides a key opportunity for effective education and communication also towards the next assembly. The group identified issues to continue to address: growing violence against women and children and the violence on the global scale. It also identified the need for deepening the theological reflection on peace-building and reconciliation.

- 3 Affirmation of the Human Dignity, which reflects the convening, partnership and advocacy roles. The focus here on human rights advocacy includes the strengthening of the UN office.
- 4 Living letters, focused on churches in conflict situations. These person to person encounters provide a strong example of accompaniment, together with an experience of, and opportunity for, in depth communication. The group questioned why there is an extra “living letters” section in P6, and recommends it be merged with P3.

The group also recommends the development of more liturgical and theological material for all the above programme activities.

A further question for management to consider: given the interdependence of themes, should P3 and P4 perhaps be merged?

## 15 **P4 Justice, diakonia and responsibility for creation**

The “convening” role in this programme area entails the creation of space for reflection, analysis and the search for new approaches, processes and strategies, as the council responds to the current crisis from a faith base – God's promise of fullness of life. That means:

- bridging the diverse gaps
- sharing best practice
- coherence, from listening and sharing values (e.g. justice)
- faith, theology and spirituality

The group looked at each of the projects in the programme area to see how far they were fulfilling the four roles of convening; developing partnership; education and communication; advocacy and accompaniment.

The convening role is strongest in the project on socio and ecological justice in the context of globalization, which includes poverty wealth and ecological justice. Climate change is included here. The programme has the potential for developing partnerships; education and communication; advocacy and accompaniment.

The ACT Alliance undertakes work once generated within the WCC, and the WCC makes a strong contribution to its work. Such work requires both collaboration and theological foundation.

Among the projects in this programme area, partnership features most strongly in Diakonia for Transformative Justice, with its regional emphasis, the Ecumenical Water Network and work on HIV/Aids. The latter is also a key example of advocacy and accompaniment with a significant educational dimension.

There is a new educational role in the expanded remit of the Ecumenical Solidarity Fund.

## 16 **P5 Education and ecumenical formation**

There are now three principal activities in P5, based at Bossey: the Ecumenical Institute, the lay formation work and Ecumenical Theological Education (ETE). The general secretary intimated in his report his intention to move ETE into another programme area.

The group measured each against the four roles identified by the committee, and concluded that each matches all four, so these three activities should remain priorities. In saying that, however, the group:

- a) Affirmed that a new way of working is needed for ETE that will strengthen and develop networking in the regions.
- b) Agreed that it was wise, because of their distinct histories and identities, to separate ETE from Bossey, but urged that the two will need to continue to work closely together, particularly in their relationship with the regions.
- c) Affirmed that lay formation should remain integrated with the work at Bossey.
- d) Wished to see separate advisory groups established for ETE and for the work remaining focused at Bossey, recognizing that this entailed some variation in the remit of the commission on Education and Ecumenical Formation.

The group raised the tentative question whether, given that scholarship funds were running out, Bossey should now become financially autonomous and set free to raise its own funds.

## 17 **P6 Inter-religious dialogue and communication**

The group understood convening (including co-convening) as part of the core function of this programme area. So is the building of partnerships with ecumenical partners and churches who undertake inter-religious dialogue. Inter-religious formation is highly necessary, and needs to be a component in programmes of theological education. Similarly there is a need for reflection and analysis in conjunction with education, formation and communication. In consequence, inter-religious dialogue and cooperation remain a significant priority for the WCC.

The group recommends that the staff of different programmes – e.g. P3, P4 and P6 - should work together so that advocacy and relationship go hand in hand.

In the group's view the priorities in this programme area are:

- 1 Accompanying churches in situations of inter-religious conflict. Within this programme area, the term “accompaniment” needs careful consideration. The WCC and the fellowship need to be equipped to do such accompanying. That is part of the task of P6.
- 2 Inter-religious dialogue.
- 3 Intra-Christian dialogue on Christian self-understanding, of the kind that equips Christians to engage with people of other religions.

## **Comments of the committee on the sub-group reports**

18 The committee heard a strong plea for scholarships for those who will teach in theological seminaries. Students from the global South cannot get visas to study in Europe or North America. WCC scholarships funded by government funds now have to rule out theological education. Northern institutions that once offered free places can afford to offer them no longer. This is a management issue, though it is also helpful to have it drawn to central committee's attention.

19 The committee received a comment from the public issues committee: “in general we are aware that there is a wide spread lack of knowledge about major programme areas. We hope that the programme committee can give attention to this, perhaps by adopting the communication methods of the youth, “Echos”, who send out regular e-mails to all central committee members updating them on their work.” Given the emphasis on communication that the committee had

itself made, it affirmed the need for new, low-cost ways to communicate the programme activities, and asked staff to talk with Echos to learn from their experience.

### **Recommendations from consultative bodies**

- 20 The committee did not have time to process the recommendations from the consultative bodies that were included in the report of the core group.

### **Reflection on the committee's process**

- 21 This was the first time that the programme committee's work had been prepared by the core group. The reports it received from the previous three meetings of the core group also reflected the operation of a new structure. The committee appreciated the preparatory report prepared by the core group, though was worried that it went to central committee before the programme committee could respond to it. It was also important that views it expressed should be thoroughly discussed.
- 22 The committee felt its work had improved through the core group's work, but there was still room for further improvement. Either a new way of working needs to be found that enables the committee to fulfil its function or else the structure needs to be changed. The committee agreed:
- That it would like to see the core group continue;
  - That the core group would solicit from programme committee members proposals for improving the process;
  - That the core group would seek to find a way to prepare its preliminary report earlier, if possible a month before central committee meets;
  - That the preliminary report should be a draft of a possible final report, so programme committee can spend its time discussing it.