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For Action

STATEMENT ON THE 10TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE KYOTO PROTOCOL

1. Climate change has been a concern for the WCC for decades. At the 1975 WCC Assembly in Nairobi the concept of “sustainable society” was articulated, having in mind that the world’s future required a vision of development that could be sustained for the long-term, both economically and environmentally. In the 1980s, after the WCC Assembly in Vancouver adopted the process focused on “Justice, Peace and the Integrity of Creation” (JPIC), many churches became increasingly attentive to environmental concerns adopting policy statements and initiating education and advocacy activities on specific issues. The JPIC process culminated in the World Convocation on Justice, Peace and the Integrity of Creation in Seoul, Korea in 1990 which highlighted the inter-relatedness of economic inequity, militarism, ecological destruction, and racial injustice. At the same time the convocation expressed the theological, ethical and spiritual basis for affirming and sustaining life in its fullness. The concern on “global warming” began in some WCC member churches in the late 1980s. During the 1990s, the WCC work on environment related issues focused primarily on global climate change, monitoring the UN Commission on Sustainable Development, and beginning a significant engagement on ethical issues.

2. The 1992 UN Conference on Environment and Development in Rio de Janeiro provided an opportunity for witnessing to the spiritual dimensions of the ecological crisis. As a preparation to the conference, an inter-faith consultation was hosted by the WCC in August 1991 to develop proposals for inclusion in an “Earth Charter” and, at the conference itself, representatives from different religions held joint vigils, ceremonies and workshops. In the following years the inter-faith dimension was an integral part of the WCC’s work on climate change. For instance in 1997 in Kyoto, Japan, at the Third Conference of Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), an interreligious gathering was held in the Catholic Cathedral of Kyoto with participation of Buddhists, Christians, Hindus, Jews, Muslims and representatives of other religions.

3. The Bible teaches the wholeness and interrelatedness of creation. The vision in Genesis 2 of God making humans out of dust is about the interrelatedness between humans and all the other parts of the Earth, both living and non-living. This Earth is the place of God’s incarnation and the whole creation is a work of the Triune God. Through this creative work God provided all creatures the conditions to live a life as it is meant to be, in a specific relation towards one another. When the whole creation is threatened by climate change we are called to speak out and act as an expression of our commitment to life, justice and love.

4. Now, ten years after Kyoto, climate change has shifted from a discussion within the UN, the scientific community and other specialists to the public arena. It has become clear climate is changing, and human action is one of the important causes of this. Science and the experiences of member churches around the world confirm the reality of human induced climate change. The UN sponsored Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), for instance, has emphasized that the continued increment of the natural “greenhouse effect” due to the emission of carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases (GHG) will cause an increase in global mean temperatures of 1.4° to 5.8 °C (compared to pre-industrial levels) by the end of this century.

5. All regions of the world are experiencing drastic changes in rainfall patterns, severe droughts and unprecedented floods. Global warming is leading to a rise in sea level. The increased frequency and strength of meteorological phenomena like hurricanes, cyclones, typhoons, floods and landslides, especially within the tropics, have caused thousands of casualties in several countries. The Antarctic continent and the Arctic region as well as Greenland and glaciers around the world are undergoing intensive melting due to temperature increase. Those who are and will be suffering the most are the poor and vulnerable communities in the affected places. Churches cannot keep silent in this regard and have in various ways expressed their concerns through periodic messages and calls to the world.

6. In Kyoto, Japan, on 11 December 1997, the text of the protocol of the UNFCCC was adopted. This year, therefore, is the commemoration of the tenth anniversary of the Kyoto Protocol. The protocol sets out actual targets with a set time for industrialized countries to reduce their greenhouse gas emissions that are contributing to climate change. The Kyoto Protocol is an important first step forward towards a just and sustainable global climate policy regime. However, in the last ten years, it has become clear it is not enough. Further radical steps to reduce greenhouse gas emissions are urgently needed as emissions of carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases are still far above sustainable levels and even increasing.

7. Since its adoption in 1997, the Kyoto Protocol has come into force only in 2005 and now 174 countries have deposited instruments of ratifications, accessions approvals or acceptances. Nevertheless, major emitters, like the USA and Australia, have withdrawn from the Kyoto Protocol process and there is a trend to convert the Kyoto Protocol into a market-based instrument for minimizing economic damage to national economies and business opportunities instead of stressing its purpose to limit greenhouse gas emissions. Since the coming into force of the Kyoto Protocol the sessions of the Meeting of the Parties to the Kyoto Protocol (CMP), take place at the same time as the sessions of the Conference of the Parties (COP) to the UNFCCC.

8. After 2012, the end of the first commitment period of the Kyoto Protocol, a much more principle-based approach is essential for reaching an effective, equitable and justifiable global climate policy regime. Principles that should be taken into account include the principle of equal entitlements to the use of the atmosphere and equal rights to development; the principle of historic responsibility; the precautionary principle (prospective responsibility); the principle of priority for the poorest and weakest; and the principle of maximum risk reduction. Some frameworks that lay the groundwork for this principle-based regime already exist, like the Contraction and Convergence and the Greenhouse Development Rights approaches which need to be further studied and sharpened.

9. The thirteenth Conference of the Parties to the UNFCCC (COP13) and the third Session of the Meeting of the Parties to the Kyoto Protocol (CMP3) to be held in Bali, Indonesia, will have high on the agenda these concerns, trying to agree on a “Bali Mandate”, a timetable for future international action post Kyoto Protocol’s first commitment period.

10. In the present context, there is a need for more comprehensive policies to support and promote adaptation and mitigation programmes in countries severely affected by climate change, particularly in Africa, Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) regions which are the most vulnerable. Governments in the industrialized countries (OECD) should significantly increase their support to programmes of adaptation and mitigation in these regions as manifestations of commitment to their current and historic responsibility in high emissions. Such comprehensive support will only come about if the prevailing economic model, with its focus on unqualified economic growth combined with the tendency to neglect and deny the destructive effects on people and the earth, is thoroughly transformed. The WCC dedicates its work to supporting such a transformation.

11. The Executive Committee of the World Council of Churches, meeting in Etchmiadzin, Armenia, 25-28 September 2007:

- a. reiterates the concerns of the churches on climate change which is adversely affecting poor and vulnerable communities in various parts of the world;
- b. affirms the basic thrust of the UNFCCC to provide an instrument for a significant reduction of greenhouse gases in order to mitigate human induced climate change;
- c. commemorates the tenth anniversary of the Kyoto Protocol and celebrates the protocol as an important step forward towards a just and sustainable global climate policy regime;
- d. calls all those countries that have ratified the Kyoto Protocol to fully implement its provisions and those who have not, especially major greenhouse gases emitters, to meet targets at least as strict as those included in the protocol;
- e. encourages member churches, specialized ministries and other ecumenical partners to strengthen their commitment with regard to climate change, deepen their ethical and theological considerations about human induced climate change and explore interreligious avenues for cooperation for constructive intervention;
- f. welcomes the strengthening of the Ecumenical Water Network and its work focusing on water issues that are directly and indirectly associated with climate change;
- g. requests the ecumenical delegation attending the Thirteenth Conference of the Parties to the UNFCCC (COP13) and the third Session of the Meeting of the Parties to the Kyoto Protocol (CMP3) in December 2007 to include these concerns in its statement;
- h. asks WCC staff and the WCC Working Group on Climate Change to report back to the Central Committee in February 2008 and prepare a comprehensive statement on climate change.