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For Action

STATEMENT ON IRAQ

Drafts being developed now will remain provisional until the Executive Committee begins. The process of consultation on the statement and the course of events in an active crisis like Iraq (including the major US status report due September 15) may entail late changes.

The Iraqi people

1. The basic well-being and human rights of substantial portions of Iraqi society are heavily degraded after years of conflict and chaos, and remain under serious threat. Yet the suffering of the Iraqi people continues to go largely unrecognized.
2. Indicators of poverty, deprivation and human insecurity are extremely high. Effective allocations of national and international resources to remedy these ills is low. Exploitation of the country's vast petroleum resources provides little overall benefit to the Iraqi people. Meanwhile, there are massive and continuing expenditures in Iraq, primarily for military and security programs.
3. Today one-third of the Iraqi population is in need of emergency and humanitarian assistance. More than half (54%) of Iraqis live in abject poverty or worse, according to a recent Iraqi government survey. One Iraqi in seven is internally uprooted or has fled beyond the country's borders. Among all of these groups, there are severe and chronic deficits in food security, in access to clean water, sanitation, health services and education, and in possibilities to earn a livelihood.
4. Iraq's dire humanitarian situation developed during the last years of Saddam Hussein's regime and the sanctions imposed on Iraq. Since the US-led invasion, extensive displacement of people has complicated matters further.
5. The prevalence of violence by non-state armed groups, regular armed forces and criminal groups affects people in most parts of Iraq, causing heavy casualties, fear, deprivation and emigration.
6. Based on experiences with the chronic insecurity that has set in since the invasion of 2003, national and international NGOs including church organizations have rather limited but still significant opportunities to deliver effective humanitarian assistance under current circumstances.

7. However, international recognition and action on the humanitarian crisis in Iraq is lacking. Internationally, a climate of silence about their fate prevails instead. The silence is punctuated by daily reports of casualty figures but appears to be sustained by governments' reluctance to engage in the difficult international political task of working out solutions to the Iraq crisis.

Iraq's Christian communities

8. Amid the many suffering communities in Iraq, the fate of Iraq's Christian communities raises additional cause for concern among churches in other countries. Their fate speaks twice, informing churches overseas both about general humanitarian needs in Iraq and about the urgency of saving Iraq's Christian community and its important contribution to society for centuries.
9. On the one hand, the current Christian exodus is but one of many warnings that radically new approaches to Iraq's crisis are needed. Strategies based on the use of force have driven the country into chaos. To continue them has the effect of adding various fuels to a fire. The flight of Christians from Iraq is a sign of the failure of policies that were purported to bring stability and peace to Iraq and even the region. (See *proposed Minute on Iran and the Middle East regional crisis*)
10. Traumas that affect Christian communities -- violent attacks, incessant fear, frequent kidnappings and social upheaval -- also affect Iraqi society at large. Economic collapse, displacement and emigration are effecting all religious communities in Iraq. The fate of Christians must not be seen in isolation from Muslims, or used to worsen relations with Muslims.
11. Iraqi society and its foreign partners must find ways to install the rule of law. Intolerance between social groups has grown markedly as an outcome of the conflict there. The rule of law must include re-establishment of a multi-cultural equilibrium in society.
12. On the other hand, a living Christian presence is a positive reminder that peace, pluralism and tolerance are inseparable in Iraq and throughout the Middle East.
13. Christian communities striving to meet their challenges in Iraq today are showing great strength. Their continuing presence is a witness to the ethnic, cultural and religious diversity that is an essential part of the heritage and promise of the Middle East region.
14. Credit is due to the leading Muslim clerics who are using their authority to contain the violence in Iraq despite the presence of factional, foreign and criminal armed forces. These leaders understand and acknowledge the fate of the churches. Multi-religious initiatives to resolve conflicts and promote reconciliation also give cause for hope.

WCC policy toward Iraq.

15. [Insert brief citation of salient points here, or in an introductory paragraph, drawing from: Central Committee statements on Iraq, 2005, 2003 and 2002. Executive Committee statement on Iraq, 2003 and 1998. General Secretary statement on the fourth anniversary of the war in Iraq, 2007.]

Proposed recommendations:

Whereas dangers and deprivations confronting the Iraqi people give cause for great concern, those suffering are not beyond the reach of God's plenteous mercy. Members of the body of Christ are called to reach out in similar spirit with acts of compassion, demonstrations of solidarity and embassies of peace. Accordingly, the Executive Committee of the World Council of Churches, meeting in Etchmiadzin, Armenia, 25-28 September 2007, calls the member churches of the WCC to *direct action* as follows:

- A. Member churches are invited to keep the people and churches of Iraq in their prayers and to provide increase assistance to them for their church life, witness and service to society. Support can be channelled through ACT International, the Middle East Council of Churches, WCC member churches in the Middle East, WCC-related specialized ministries and the various church families present in Iraq.
- B. WCC member churches are requested to find ways to raise awareness in their parishes and in their countries concerning the general suffering of the Iraqi people including its Christian communities.
- C. Churches are urged to provide support to displaced people inside Iraq and to Iraqi refugees through ACT International, the Middle East Council of Churches, WCC member churches in the Middle East, and WCC-related specialized ministries. The help required includes advocacy for the two million Iraqis in neighbouring countries to receive legal status and greater international assistance.
- D. Churches are encouraged to demonstrate solidarity with the Christian communities and people of Iraq by undertaking joint initiatives and direct contacts.

Whereas the core problems of the Iraq crisis remain largely unresolved, namely, the failures to meet basic needs, ensure public security and provide essential infrastructure; the low levels of multilateral support for government institutions and civil society groups; the on-going presence of occupation forces; a balanced sharing of national resources; and reconciliation between communities alienated during the conflict; therefore the Executive Committee calls for WCC member churches *advocacy with governments*:

- E. Member churches of the WCC are asked to contact the governments occupying Iraq to remind them of their obligations to the people of Iraq under the Geneva Conventions.
- F. WCC member churches are requested to engage their own governments over the necessity of breaking the international silence on the humanitarian crisis in Iraq and addressing that crisis much more robustly.
- G. WCC member churches are urged to engage their own governments on the importance of breaking the political barrier to open policy debate, including at the UN Security Council, on the multilateral negotiations and support that is required to assist the people of Iraq to build a viable future.
- H. Churches are requested to inform their governments of their concern for the fate of Iraq's Christian communities, making clear that it is part of their concern for the general suffering of the Iraqi people.