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For Action

MINUTE ON THE MIDDLE EAST

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 Iran may entail late changes.

Regional parameters for peace in Iraq

[Add introductory paragraph briefly reviewing WCC policy on regional peace and, where necessary, citing statements related to the points below.]

1. From Iraq to Lebanon to Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territories, unresolved conflicts have deeply scarred the peoples of the region. Families are torn or separated. Countless women, children and men are living shattered lives. They are held hostage by protracted injustice and violence. In each place prospects for peace are linked to progress on issues that affect the whole region.
2. Just and durable solutions to the violence and instability in Iraq, Israel/Palestine and Lebanon will require constructive shifts in governmental policies across the region and internationally, most especially in the cases of Iran, Israel, Syria and Lebanon and among the foreign powers involved.
3. Threats to begin another war in the Middle East defy the lessons of both history and ethics. We refer to the belligerent stance of the US toward Iran and of Iranian threats against the US and Israel. Judging from recent experience, there is a likelihood that any new use of force would abuse international legal standards once again. The region and its people must not suffer another war that is unlawful, immoral, ill-advised and unnecessary.
4. Bilateral and multilateral negotiations to resolve conflicts have served both parties well, now and in the past. The success slowly emerging from US-North Korean and six-party talks is a relevant example. Similar multi- and bilateral progress is necessary in the regional crisis affecting the Middle East:
5. US-Iranian and multi-party negotiations to settle outstanding nuclear issues as well as achieve a *modus vivendi* regarding their respective national interests in Iraq and the wider region.

6. Initiatives by Israel and its neighbours, including the parties to the Arab Peace Initiative, and by the US, the European Union, Russia and the United Nations to finally end the 40-year occupation of Palestinian territories and establish a viable Palestinian state in East Jerusalem, the West Bank and the Gaza Strip in accordance with UN resolutions.
7. Return of the Golan Heights to Syria as part of a comprehensive Syrian-Israeli accord that settles, among other things, outstanding issues in both countries respecting the sovereignty of Lebanon.
8. Reversing the recent trend in the West and among Western allies in the region to focus on and promote Sunni-Shia differences; progress on this issue will require marked reductions in international and regional transfers of arms to Sunni and Shiite groups.
9. Taking steps to reduce the threatening postures of Israel and Iran toward each other.
10. The withdrawal of all US forces from Iraq and implementation, in their stead, of alternative national and multilateral political, economic and security programs.
11. Progress in resolving these regional problems, especially those that have become *causes célèbres* across the Muslim world and beyond, is essential for ending the current spiral of violence in Iraq, Lebanon and Israel/Palestine. Non-state armed groups will continue to find resources, recruits and opportunities to use violence against US, Israeli and Iraqi targets unless these issues are addressed.

Proposed Recommendation:

Member churches of the WCC are urged to impress upon their governments their acute concern that the US or its allies settle the dispute over Iran's nuclear programme through negotiations and not through the use of military force. Governments should also be encouraged to convey this concern to the US and its allies.

The international church position against attacking Iran seeks protection for all the populations involved, including the US and Israeli publics. Years of unilateralist military incursions in the Middle East have compromised public safety and national well-being across the region and left many people vulnerable.

The position also reflects the churches' conviction – in an age impatient for new and shared solutions to global problems – that negotiated solutions are the only path to peace for the Middle East and for a world increasingly destabilized by the regional crisis there.