

Doc 7.1

ACTIONS ON PUBLIC ISSUES

(Covers the period between (January) September and December 2007)

The following actions have been taken on public issues since the last meeting of the World Council of Churches Executive Committee (25 – 28 September 2007, in Etchmiadzin, Armenia). Also included are issues from throughout 2007 omitted from previous Actions on Public Issues reports given to the Executive Committee at their two meetings this year:

AFRICA

- 16 – 19 May Follow-up action on the Executive Committee (Feb 2007) statement on the Horn of Africa:
WCC delegation, including the General Secretary, visited Eritrea where they met with church representatives and President Isaias Afewerki of the country. During their meetings they affirmed the WCC's commitment to churches engaged in peace, reconciliation and nation building efforts and identified ways in which the Council can contribute to the process.
- 1 – 3 July WCC delegation, including the General Secretary, visited Tanzania where he proclaimed that "today, in order to fight poverty, Africa needs to mobilize similar efforts to those rallied against colonialism". The delegation met with church leaders and visited the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda.

ASIA/PACIFIC

- 4 – 14 August Follow-up action on the Central Committee (Sept 2006) statement on the conflict in Sri Lanka, as well as preparatory action towards the International Ecumenical Peace Convocation (May 2011):
"Living Letters" ecumenical team visit to Sri Lanka sponsored by the WCC Decade to Overcome Violence project. The team found out more about the churches efforts and needs and reported back to the wider ecumenical family.
- 14 August In a gesture of support, the WCC General Secretary met with families of the Korean Christian humanitarian workers being held by the Taliban in Afghanistan. He was accompanied by the General Secretary of the National Council of Churches in Korea, Rev. Kwon Oh-sung.
- 30 August The WCC General Secretary sent a message to the Pacific Conference of Churches 9th Assembly. He underlined the "new challenges to political stability, environmental well-being and economic and cultural autonomy" in the region and expressed hope that the Pacific churches could "coordinate strategies to address the critical issues within the region".

- 31 August Letter of joy and thanksgiving from WCC General Secretary to the National Council of Churches in Korea's General Secretary, Rev. Kwon Oh-sung, on the release of 21 hostages in Afghanistan. He also noted the continued prayers of Christians throughout the world for the family and friends of the two hostages who lost their lives.
- 1 October The WCC General Secretary sent a letter of congratulations to Metropolitan Dr. Joseph Mar Irenaeus, the new head of Mar Thoma church, on his enthronement. In his letter he mentioned, "Your commitment and passion for peace and reconciliation efforts and your deep involvement in peace monitoring missions in conflict and violence affected areas in North East India, Sri Lanka and Cambodia have been appreciated and valued by the ecumenical family."
- 22 October Letter from the WCC General Secretary to WCC Executive Committee members about the actions being taken with regards to the situation in Myanmar and his decision (after consulting with church leaders there) not to issue a public statement. Instead, it was decided that he would bring up the issue during his meeting with UN Secretary General Ban Ki-Moon later in the month and that the idea of receiving a delegation from Myanmar, as well as sending an ecumenical delegation, would be explored further. A consultation for ecumenical advocacy for Myanmar has since been scheduled to take place in December.
- 21 November During a press conference in Manila, the WCC General Secretary expressed concern at the worsening human rights situation in the Philippines and announced stronger ecumenical advocacy efforts to put pressure on the Philippine government. He condemned the practice by the government and military of treating church, pastors and church workers who work for human rights as subversives or communists. He announced that the WCC would bring victims of human rights abuses in the Philippines to the upcoming session of the Geneva-based UN Human Rights Council.

EUROPE

- 24 March The Moderator of the WCC Central Committee conveyed a message of congratulations to the Lutheran World Federation on their 60th anniversary. The message called for continued work together between the two organizations on urgent issues facing churches today, including globalization and economic injustice, HIV/AIDS and human rights violations.
- 30 April – 1 May During a visit to the Irish School of Ecumenics, the WCC General Secretary gave a public lecture on "Hope and the healing of memories", as well as responded to a lecture on "Prisoner abuse: from Abu Ghraib to the passion of the Christ". He stressed that having been through the most violent century in human history, humanity needs healing and reconciliation more than ever and that the church should take the lead to help people of all faiths".

- 10 May Ecumenical gathering of more than 12,000 Christians, European church leaders and politicians, “Together for Europe 2007”, was co-moderated by a WCC president. The WCC General Secretary sent a message to the participants acknowledging that the meeting brought to the European forefront issues of redefining boundaries, climate change, water scarcity, the loss of biodiversity, and the moral obligation of mediating wars and conflicts and of receiving refugees and migrants from former colonized countries.
- 29 May – 2 June The WCC General Secretary visited Latvia & Estonia. During his visit he met with top government officials of both countries as well as church leaders where discussions centred on the role of churches and the ecumenical challenges (namely economic globalization and reconciliation and healing) in secularized, post-communist societies who had recently regained independence.
- 5 September The WCC General Secretary spoke about unity among churches in Europe transcending the common economic and political future at the opening session of the Third European Ecumenical Assembly. He called for European churches to speak with one voice for all members of an integrated Europe as well as for the millions of immigrants now living in Europe.

MIDDLE EAST

- 15 January The WCC welcomed a statement issued by several Jerusalem church leaders calling for Palestinian factions to stop fighting each other and to focus on the priority of a need for peace with justice based on United Nations resolutions. Most of the 13 leaders who submitted the statement were from WCC member churches.
- 1 May Letter from the WCC General Secretary to the Permanent Mission of Turkey to the United Nations Office at Geneva, in response to the murder of three Christians on 18 April. It asked that the Turkish government take steps to see that justice was done in those cases, but also that further crimes against religious minorities be prevented by ensuring the respect for human rights and the rule of law are enforced.
- 26 November Letter welcoming Annapolis meeting on Peace in the Middle East and hoping for its success is sent by WCC General Secretary to the United States Secretary of State, Dr. Condoleezza Rice, the Israeli Prime Minister, Ehud Olmert, and the President of Palestinian National Authority, Mahmoud Abbas. In the letter he stressed that the three criteria for success were good faith, multilateral participation and adherence to the rule of law. He mentioned the reality of past consultations having been counter-productive and said that “to meet and fail in the same manner yet again is, deeply and dangerously irresponsible”.
- 29 November The representative of the WCC to the United Nations in New York spoke on behalf of the International Coordinating Network on Palestine during the observation of the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People. He denounced the ongoing failure of the international community to stand with the Palestinian people in ending the occupation and securing their right to

return. He said that this failure also impeded the peace, justice, security and rights that the international community had sought to uphold for Israelis.

Ongoing Follow-up action on the Executive Committee (Sept 2007) minute on Iran and the Middle East Crisis and statement on Christian communities in Iraq:
Associated Press reported on both documents with considerable pick-up. Copies were sent directly to networks and partners involved in Middle East advocacy and churches in the region, as well as being shared in person as meetings take place with member church leaders and counterpart agencies. They were shared with participants at UN Advocacy Week and presented to the United States Mission to the United Nations. These uses and use with governments will continue.

NORTH AMERICA

9 – 12 March Staff from the WCC United Nations Liaison Office in New York participated in the fifth annual Ecumenical Advocacy Days in Washington D.C. The aim of those days was to strengthen the ecumenical movement through a process of raising the awareness and voices of US Christians on the way their country's policy impacts around the world.

14 – 24 Sept Preparatory action towards the International Ecumenical Peace Convocation (May 2011):
“Living Letters” ecumenical team visit to the United States sponsored by the WCC Decade to Overcome Violence project. The team found out more about the churches efforts and needs and reported back to the wider ecumenical family.

CLIMATE CHANGE

12 – 15 April The WCC co-sponsored a meeting of church-related relief and development agencies to renew and update common ecumenical advocacy positions and policy in relation to intergovernmental negotiation on climate change in the next round of UNFCCC COP 13 climate change negotiations in Bali in December and in preparation of the 2012 first commitment period expiration of the Kyoto protocol. They also reviewed plans for a proposed global civil society campaign on climate change that faith communities along with environmental organizations plan on launching later this year.

ECONOMIC GLOBALIZATION

18 May The WCC Acting General Secretary called for reform of International Financial Institutions following the resignation of World Bank President, Paul Wolfowitz. In his statement he stresses that “reforms that ensure a greater representation and more effective voice for the developing countries must be set in place now”.

5 – 9 November Follow-up action to the Alternative Globalization Addressing People and Earth (AGAPE) process approved at WCC 9th Assembly (Feb 2006):

First of five regional church encounters to be held over the next six years on different continents was held in Tanzania. It brought together people of faith from Africa and beyond to work on ecumenical strategies and actions for addressing the interlinked problems of poverty, excessive wealth and ecological degradation.

6 December Letter from the WCC General Secretary to the head of the European Commission for External Trade, Peter Mandelson, expressing concern about the ongoing pressure exerted by the European Union (EU) on African, Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) countries to sign interim Economic Partnership Agreements (EPAs) by December 31st 2007. In the letter he states that “negotiations between EU and ACP countries should not be based on pressure and threats but on fairness that serves to redress historical and structural links between the EU and ACP countries”. The WCC called for “adequate time to be allocated to ACP countries for appropriate discussion of EPAs in their parliaments so as to hear the voices of the people in these countries”.

ECUMENICAL WATER NETWORK

21 – 25 May Follow-up action on the 9th Assembly (Feb 2006) statement on Water for Life: The Ecumenical Water Network – housed and partly staffed in the WCC – organized a conference, “Churches for Water in Africa”, in cooperation with the Uganda Joint Christian Council, the All Africa Conference of Churches (AACC) and the Agency for Cooperation and Research in Development, and opened by Uganda’s minister of water and environment. The statement issued at the end of the meeting called for a “holistic approach” to water issues, stressed the importance of the role churches must play, and emphasized that access to water is a human right. It explored how churches can address the political, social and economic conditions that underlie water access problems

HIV/AIDS

4 – 7 July Follow-up action on the Central Committee (Sept 2006) statement on HIV/AIDS:
WCC General Secretary participated on a panel convened by the Young Women’s Christian Association and the International Community of Women living with AIDS at the International Women’s Summit about HIV/AIDS calling for a “Christ-centred approach with love as its language”.

INTER-RELIGIOUS RELATIONS AND DIALOGUE

7 June WCC General Secretary delivered a keynote lecture at the German Kirchentag on “How Can Religions Live Together?” In his speech he emphasized the role of globalization in current ethno-religious conflicts, saying that the current upsurge in new forms of religious fundamentalism is “a form of collective resistance against cultural hegemony in the context of globalization”. He also called on the need to acknowledge past chapters of Christian mission history in order to improve relations between religions today.

- 27 September The Representative of the WCC to the United Nations in New York participated on a panel during a discussion (co-sponsored by the WCC) between Iranian President, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, and about 140 people of faith from across the United States. This discussion was called in an effort to promote dialogue as an alternative to possible military confrontation between Iran and the United States.
- 15 October The WCC General Secretary publicly welcomed a letter addressed to a number of world Christian leaders from some 140 Muslim leaders entitled, “A Common Word between Us and You”. He called it “unprecedented in its unity of purpose and gives hope for what people of faith can achieve together”. He said the WCC was ready to participate in putting together a concrete process to implement the suggestions put forth in the letter.

MIGRATION

- 25 April The WCC General Secretary gave a speech at a meeting of the Churches Together in Wales and its Commission for Racial Equality on “Global migration and new ecclesial realities”. He stressed that global migration poses new challenges to churches worldwide and urged them to increase their capacity to practice hospitality in this era of new migrants and “new forms of migration”. He called on the responsibility of churches to inform public opinion about the realities faced by migrants in their countries of origin and said that migration should challenge churches “to overcome...injustice, discrimination and contempt.”
- 6 – 8 June The Global Ecumenical Network on Migration (GEM) met in Nairobi, where it was opened by Kenya’s minister for migration and hosted by the AACC. GEM was formed by the WCC to engage and challenge churches in their work with migrants and to understand global migration better. Migration in today’s world raises questions about inter-faith relations, identity, justice, racism, advocacy and diakonia and affects the contexts in which churches live.
- 6 – 9 July Representatives of African, European and Middle Eastern churches, church-related organizations and ecumenical bodies working on migration issues and associated with the World Council of Churches held a meeting to discuss migration in and between those regions. The meeting ended with a statement to the Global Forum on Migration and Development (GFMD), welcoming its creation as an avenue to explore new initiatives for international cooperation and partnerships and providing several recommendations on how to make the GFMD a success, including developing a “coherent and binding body of international rights of migrants”.

PEACE AND DISARMAMENT

- 15 February Statement by the WCC General Secretary welcoming as a “major breakthrough” the agreement reached at the Six Party Talks (U.S., Russia, China, Japan and the two Koreas) in Beijing where the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea committed itself to take initial steps towards denuclearization in return for energy and economic aid...

- 17 – 20 May WCC staff from the Middle East desk, DOV and the women’s desk gave presentations at the international ecumenical conference on “Forgiveness, peace and reconciliation”. Discussions centred on peace, justice and security and how they relate to religion, spirituality and healing.
- 9 August Follow-up action on the Executive Committee (February 2007) statement against nuclear proliferation:
The WCC General Secretary proposed a parallel meeting of churches from nations involved in the Six Party Talks - including churches from Canada, Scandinavia and the European Union - at the next round of talks. The recommendation was made during a speech given at the 100th Anniversary Conference of the Great Korean Revival. The Korean churches endorsed the proposal in a written statement and asked the WCC to facilitate the parallel meeting.
- 21 September Follow-up action on the meeting between the WCC General Secretary and UN Secretary General in 2004:
International Day of Prayer for Peace coordinated by DOV and coinciding with the United Nations International Day of Peace.
- 1 – 4 October Preparatory action towards the International Ecumenical Peace Convocation (May 2011):
Consultation on “Healing of Memories – Reconciling Communities” co-sponsored by WCC. The consultation assessed best practices from five case studies and sought to establish a summary or manual that would help churches, civil society groups and policy makers to understand the needs and options of community healing.
- 23 October The WCC General Secretary took part in a panel discussion on “Faiths, War and Peace” at an interfaith dialogue for peace organized by the Sant’Egidio Catholic community. The dialogue brought together such people as Pope Benedict XVI, the chief rabbi of Israel, Yona Metzger, as well as the presidents of several countries. The General Secretary mentioned three major threats to world peace today, “nuclear proliferation, climate change and the threat of deepening injustices”. He emphasized the positive role religion can play in “forg(ing) common visions and goals for the sake of life”.

UNITED NATIONS

- 19 March The WCC co-sponsored an ecumenical delegation from the Philippines within the framework of the UN Human Rights Council meeting in Geneva. The delegation delivered a report and put forth a call to action documenting human rights violations in the Philippines.
- 14 - 23 May The WCC facilitated a delegation of 134 individuals from 33 countries and six workshops at the 60th World Health Assembly in Geneva. The delegation presented three statements pertaining to issues under discussion, including one in support of the rational use of medicine.

- 24 September The WCC, in partnership with the Asia Pacific Forum on Women Law and Development, Asian Human Rights Commission and the Unrepresented Nations and Peoples Organization, submitted an oral intervention at the United Nations Human Rights Council, asking them to prevail upon the Philippine government to curb extrajudicial killings.
- 29 October The WCC General Secretary met with the UN Secretary General at the beginning of the 3rd Annual UN Advocacy Week in New York. During the meeting the two reaffirmed their commitment to strong and close collaboration. The WCC General Secretary brought up some of the issues on the churches' advocacy agenda: Horn of Africa, nuclear disarmament, peace in the Middle East, and overcoming poverty and economic injustice. He also announced the WCC's intention to propose that the UN declare a "Decade of Inter-religious Dialogue and Cooperation for Peace". The proposal would be submitted to the UN in the course of the coming year.

OTHER

- 20 – 25 January The WCC was part of a global ecumenical delegation at the 7th World Social Forum, a meeting place for civil society opposed to neo-liberalism come together to debate, think, share, propose and network. The delegation organized events focussing on: wealth, poverty and ecology; life giving agriculture; water, environment and climate change; ecological debt; and the responsibility to protect.