

WCRC deepens commitment in Middle East

MAY 15TH, 2015

The executive committee of the World Communion of Reformed Churches (WCRC) concluded its meeting in Lebanon by issuing a [call to its churches](#) for greater solidarity and action to help bring peace to the Middle East.

“This statement is a commitment. It’s a proclamation from the WCRC that they will walk the talk with us in this region,” said Najla Kassab, executive committee member from Lebanon. “The news of the Middle East is all over the world in terms of the conflicts and struggles. We were here firstly for solidarity,” said Jerry Pillay, WCRC president.

“Part of that solidarity was to listen and gain new understandings. Often the media do not tell the story that should be told,” said Pillay. “We have heard the stories of the people of the Middle East—from Egypt, Iraq, Syria, Lebanon—and all of these stories were able to inform us more accurately about what is happening.”

The statement summarizes what the executive committee heard and then presents this response:

- We call for global recognition of the suffering of all people in the Middle East.
- We call for violence to cease in Syria immediately and pray for peace to spread like ripples from there throughout the entire region.
- We urge our officers and secretariat to strengthen the bonds among our member churches in this region to consolidate their communion.
- We commit ourselves to tell the stories of our Middle East sisters and brothers to the wider world.

The statement also contains seven requests to WCRC member churches, including increasing solidarity, welcoming refugees and advocating for peace.

- [Read the full statement.](#)

“This statement comprises a call to us to walk more closely with the churches of the region and to commit ourselves to support the Middle East Christians so that they stay, flourish and be peacemakers,” said Chris Ferguson, WCRC general secretary.

“What’s clear is our future here is also to be a global organization that can have an impact outside of the Middle East,” said Ferguson. “We must look at the root causes of conflicts here and call on world governments to change their propensity to look for military solutions.”

The World Communion of Reformed Churches’ executive committee meets annually to provide oversight to the work of the WCRC, both programmatically and financially. It held its 2015 meeting outside of Beirut, Lebanon.

For the past 58 years, the Christian Conference of Asia (CCA) had marked significant events in the life and history of the ecumenical movement in Asia. Not only had it brought churches and ecumenical partners together for fellowship but it enabled a bigger space for dialogue and unity where churches could respond significantly to what needs to be done in the “Oikoumene”, the whole inhabited earth.

Time and again, the 14th General Assembly has etched a significant page in the history of CCA bringing together representatives of 101 member churches and 17 national councils into a common ground where they can set aside their differences and talk about their common concerns. Direction-setting for CCA The Assembly, during its week long deliberations provided an open space for participants to discern the ecumenical responses in the light of Asian issues. Some of these themes included: mission and witness in multi-religious Asia; ecumenical formation and theological education; prophetic diakonia and ecumenical advocacy; moving beyond conflicts and building peace with justice; health and healing as new imperatives for ecumenical actions; communicating within the fellowship and beyond; and financial sustainability and organizational management. The Sarasehan as well as the Committee on Public Issues provided ample opportunities for participants to bring up social realities from their own context. Some of these significant major issues raised to the committee include: human trafficking, peace and security; climate justice; displacement of people due to conflicts; violence of women and children, among others.

After days of tiring work and relentless discussions, you may find yourself in retrospection: What's next for CCA? The Assembly has been a venue for Asian churches to reflect on how CCA should respond to the diverse and rapidly changing realities in Asia. More than just reflecting on the main concerns, the real challenge is how the churches can be more socially relevant and realize their common witness as a church.

An equally important question is how we, as CCA and as a church, can go beyond living together and translate our faith perspectives into active and concrete acts of love and compassion so that we can bring transformation not only in Asia but to the world? Asia has a distinct and rich cultural heritage – a home to profound cultural traditions and spirituality. And yet our history is also a history of constant struggle and resistance to dominations and decrepit systems in our society.

We celebrate a strong and wide movement not only within the bounds of the church but a movement of all peoples who continue to struggle for justice and peace. As a relevant community of churches in Asia, we must go beyond living together by coming out of our comfort zones of conservatism and reactionary tendencies by journeying with the people in their continuing struggles. We must go beyond living together by addressing the systems and structures that steal the very dignity of life. We must go beyond living together by affirming our roles and being in the forefront of reshaping our unfolding history and consciously transforming the world with the strong movement of peoples. Together, we must work towards birthing a new Oikoumene where justice and peace exist, and where everyone lives a life in all its fullness.

New Humanitarian Pledge to Ban Nuclear Weapons advances as troubled treaty stalls

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Four weeks of negotiations on nuclear weapons came to a close on Friday 22 May 2015, as the Review Conference of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) ended without a formal agreement. Despite the outcome, a bright new prospect towards a world without nuclear weapons has emerged in the form of a Humanitarian Pledge, now endorsed by 107 states, which promises “to fill the legal gap for the prohibition and elimination of nuclear weapons”. As the few states with nuclear weapons worked to complicate, and many critics say weaken, the NPT review process, more and more governments without nuclear weapons endorsed the new pledge.

Members of the International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons (ICAN), including the World Council of Churches and some of its member churches, are promoting the pledge in every region of the world. The “credibility” gap refers to the perceived chronic failure of nuclear-armed

states to fulfil their treaty obligation to negotiate nuclear disarmament. The “confidence” gap stems from the same states espousing the goal of a nuclear-weapon-free world while modernizing their nuclear arsenals at the cost of hundreds of billions of dollars.

The “moral” gap is especially wide and of particular concern to representatives of the churches. “The nuclear powers at the conference are claiming that their security is worth whatever these horrible weapons risk doing to others,” the Rev. Dr Olav Fykse Tveit, WCC general secretary said in a statement issued during the meeting. “That is not acceptable. What nuclear weapons do to people and the planet – to God’s wonderful creation – is immoral, unethical and contrary to the will of God,” he said...

159 countries have declared “Nuclear weapons must never be used again under any circumstances”. The churches said the new humanitarian approach to nuclear disarmament “has done what the NPT has failed to do—empower the majority in their commitment to eliminate nuclear arms”.

The failure of the NPT to produce a consensus document frustrated the many countries that have fulfilled their commitments to refrain from developing nuclear weapons and who expect the nuclear-armed states to fulfil their legal obligation to disarm.

In open sessions and behind closed doors, nuclear powers attempted to block or weaken disarmament measures. France, the United Kingdom and the United States argued that nuclear weapons provide security and that disarmament must proceed slowly. However, a growing number of states and civil society organizations challenge this rationale and highlight the unacceptable risks that nuclear weapons pose to humanity.

The Humanitarian Pledge is a refreshing change amid the habitual misuse of the NPT by a few nuclear-armed states to perpetuate their privileges. It is widely believed the proposed outcome document from the 2015 NPT Review Conference was already weak and did not reflect the broad majority calls for urgent and effective measures for nuclear disarmament. Then the US, the UK and Canada...announced that they would not be able to support it at all. They were acting on behalf of Israel, another nuclear-armed state that is not even a member of the NPT.

Several governments decried the current situation as “nuclear colonialism” or “nuclear apartheid” because a small minority of nuclear-armed states control both the NPT process and the nuclear weapons that should be eliminated. However, new hope has emerged in the form of the Humanitarian Pledge which supports a process, open to all and block-able by none, “to stigmatize, prohibit and eliminate nuclear weapons in light of their unacceptable humanitarian consequences and associated risks”.

During the NPT conference, WCC representatives delivered a multi-religious statement, “**Faith Communities Concerned about the Humanitarian Consequences of Nuclear Weapons**”, and served as panellists to discuss the NPT’s disarmament obligation, Nuclear-Weapon-Free Zones and the advocacy role of religious organizations in disarmament processes.

Dr Emily Welty, vice-moderator of the WCC Commission of the Churches on International Affairs, is a university professor in New York City. Jonathan Frerichs is a WCC staff member.