



Arbeitskreis Gerechtigkeit, Frieden, Bewahrung der Schöpfung  
der Konföderation evangelischer Kirchen in Niedersachsen

### Fachtag Ökumene 2022

**11. Vollversammlung des Ökumenischen Rates der Kirchen,  
31. August bis 8. September 2022 in Karlsruhe**

„Die Liebe Christi bewegt, versöhnt und eint die Welt“  
Denk- und Handlungsimpulse aus der weltweiten Ökumene

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## Dokumentation des Fachtags Ökumene

Samstag, den 15. Oktober 2022

Hannover, Lukaskirche

Dessauerstraße 2

## 1. Zur Einführung

*Die Themen Versöhnung und Einigkeit sind heute aktueller denn je. Welche Denk- und Handlungsimpulse der weltweiten Ökumene sind vom Fachtag „Ökumene“ des Arbeitskreises Gerechtigkeit, Frieden, Bewahrung der Schöpfung ausgegangen?*

Es war beeindruckend zu hören, mit welchen Themen sich die Delegierten in unterschiedlichen Workshops, Versammlungen und Gremien ausgetauscht haben. Schwerpunkte, die besonders für unsere Referent\*innen von Interesse waren, betrafen Jugendbeteiligung, Klimawandel, der Frieden im Nahen Osten und der Frieden in Europa. Es wurde eine Vielzahl von weiteren Themen debattiert. Als Handlungsimpulse standen zudem die Dialogbereitschaft, Gleichberechtigung und Inklusion im Fokus.

Es wurde deutlich, dass es Unterschiede in der Betrachtung dieser Themen gibt, was bei einer Veranstaltung mit Beteiligten aus aller Welt nicht weiter verwundert. Was überrascht hat, waren die Erzählungen der konstruktiven Auseinandersetzung. Anstatt auf Standpunkte zu beharren, wurde sich ausgetauscht und über Details ausführlich gesprochen. Neben konkreten Vorhaben den Klimawandel betreffend, wie dem expliziten Schutz indigener Völker, zu Absichtserklärungen gegenüber den Themen einer offeneren Sexualmoral, war vieles Vertreten, dass auch den Frieden berührt.

Der Fachtag hat sich auch mit dem Konsens-Prinzip des ÖRK auseinandergesetzt. Anders als wir es in unseren Kontexten kennen, geht es dabei nicht darum, schnell zu konkreten Ergebnissen zu kommen, die alle mittragen müssen, sondern es geht darum, Raum zu schaffen für Fragen und Unsicherheiten. Immer wieder wird abgefragt, wer sich für eine Position erwärmt (orangene Karte) oder distanziert ist (blaue Karte). Am Ende kann es auch sein, dass man nicht übereinkommt und nicht alle Meinungsverschiedenheiten aufgehoben sind. Oder, wie es einer der Referenten sagte: „Wir müssen nicht eins sein, wir können auch viele sein“ (Mauro B. de Souza). Es ist doch viel gewonnen, wenn wir ökumenisch versöhnt sein können trotz Uneinigkeit und Konflikten. Anders ist ein Zusammenschluss von so vielen historisch, kulturell und theologisch unterschiedlichen Kirchen auch nicht denkbar.

*Welchen konkreten Beitrag kann die weltweite Ökumene für ein friedlicheres Zusammenleben heute leisten?*

Während der Begriff "international" immer Nationalstaaten und Grenzen voraussetzt, ist "Ökumene" die Betonung und vielleicht Vorwegnahme des Gemeinsamen. Wir (Menschen, Christen, Kirchen) sind Teil einer weltweiten Gemeinschaft, wir teilen uns ein gemeinsames Haus. Das Wort Ökumene wurde unter anderem definiert als ein Netzwerk von Freundschaften. Daran können alle Partnerschaftsgruppen und alle Menschen mit weltweiten Begegnungserfahrungen gut anschließen.

Die Vorberichterstattung hat schon viel vorweggenommen. Da wurde vom Ausladen der russisch-orthodoxen Geistlichen gesprochen. Es wurde offenbar, dass diese auch mit einem gewissen „Mindset“ angereist sind. Dass die russisch-orthodoxen Auslandsgemeinden das wiederum komplett anders sehen, wurde nicht thematisiert. Dass das erste Mal die ukrainisch-orthodoxe Kirche anwesend war, fiel irgendwie auch unter den Tisch. Dass Jugendliche sich auf den Weg gemacht haben, aufgestanden sind und für mehr Perspektive und Beteiligung gestritten haben, wurde auch nur am Rande klar. Aber diese Eindrücke und viele weitere können etwas in den Kirchen bewegen. Wenn wir uns darüber bewusst werden, dass in jedem Dorf eine Kirche steht, aus jedem Land zahlreiche Menschen die Botschaft dieser ÖRK-VV in ihre Kirchen tragen werden, dann ist das schon eine Menge. Und am Ende steht, dass sich vielleicht nicht alle verstanden haben. Allerdings sind die Impulse für einen Aufbruch und die Zielsetzung der weltweiten Ökumene vermittelt worden.

### *Ist der Ökumenische Rat der Kirchen (ÖRK) noch ein relevanter Akteur für die Herausforderungen unserer Zeit?*

Es ist festzustellen, dass in den überregionalen Medien kaum über die Vollversammlung des ÖRK berichtet wurde und auch in der Kirchenlandschaft ist das Interesse nicht so groß, wie wir es uns als ökumenischer Arbeitskreis wünschen würden. Eine realistische Antwort lautet vielleicht: Es ist ein großer Erfolg, dass es die Ökumene noch gibt trotz der zahlreichen Krisen der Welt. Gewissermaßen eine „Ökumene des Durchhaltens“. Der konziliare Prozess ist noch nicht zu Ende, der Einsatz für Frieden, Gerechtigkeit, Schöpfung in den Kirchen und Gemeinden geht weiter und ist dringender denn je. Bis zur nächsten Vollversammlung in 8 Jahren können wir nicht warten, die Zeit läuft uns davon.

Wenn man die Menschen fragt, die anwesend waren und sich anhört, welche Art von Energie und Aufbruchsstimmung geherrscht hat, dann lässt das hoffen, dass die globalen Krisen in den Kirchen als Herausforderungen angenommen und konstruktiv bearbeitet werden.

Hannover, November 2022

Für den Arbeitskreis Gerechtigkeit, Frieden, Bewahrung der Schöpfung:

#### **Denise Irmischer**

Brot für die Welt / Diakonisches Werk evangelischer Kirchen in Niedersachsen e.V.

#### **Felix Paul**

Arbeitsfeld Friedensarbeit, Haus kirchlicher Dienste Landeskirche Hannovers

#### **Tobias Schäfer-Sell**

Referent für Advocacy, Ev.-luth. Missionswerk in Niedersachsen

## 2. Botschaft(en) der 11. Vollversammlung des Ökumenischen Rates der Kirchen, Eindrücke von Teilnehmenden:

### 2.1. Eindrücke der ÖRK Vollversammlung in Karlsruhe 2022

von **Cristina Scherer**, Referentin für internationale Ökumene im Ev.-luth. Missionswerk in Niedersachsen, Pastorin der Evangelische Kirche Lutherischen Bekenntnisses in Brasilien (IECLB), derzeit Pastorin in der Kirchengemeinde Bad Fallingbostel

#### **Begrüßung:**

Gebet aus der Oase des Friedens: Gottesdienstbuch/ÖRK

*Schöpfer Gott, wir kommen von Osten und von Westen, von Norden und von Süden zu dir. In Liebe und Güte rufst du uns zu Versöhnung und Einheit auf. Wir danken für den Reichtum, den der Heilige Geist unseren verschiedenen Traditionen verliehen hat, und für die vielen Arten, wie dein Wort gepredigt und verkündet wird. Gib uns Mut, einander in Einheit und Liebe zu umarmen. Amen. (Seite 64)*

#### a) Was bedeutet ökumenisch sein?

Ich bin in einem ökumenischen Ambiente geboren, ich war ein Teil der Gnade der lebendigen Ökumene und im pastoralen Dienst schätze ich die Ökumene. Die Teilnahme an der Vollversammlung des ÖRK war ein Geschenk und eine Verwirklichung eines Traumes für mich.

Seit meiner Kindheit war ich immer ökumenisch. Ich bin in einer lutherischen Gemeinde aufgewachsen. In meiner Stadt war der Einfluss der katholischen Kirche stark. So hatte ich in vielen Momenten in der Schule, in der Nachbarschaft, Momente des Gebets und des Zusammenlebens mit Menschen der katholischen Kirche, wo ich später aktiv an einer Gruppe junger Menschen der katholischen Kirche teilnahm, wo ich von Freunden und dem Priester immer gut aufgenommen wurde.

Später, als ich in einem anderen Staat Theologie studierte, konnte ich an der Ökumenischen Bewegung der Theologiestudierenden teilnehmen, was meinen Glauben und die Bedeutung des Dialogs und der Partnerschaft zwischen den verschiedenen Kirchen weiter stärkte. Im theologischen Studium konnte ich mit Menschen aus anderen Religionen in Kontakt treten und den Reichtum des interreligiösen Dialogs wahrnehmen.

Als Pastorin in den Gemeinden, feiern wir immer gemeinsam wichtige Termine und Ereignisse für die ökumenische Bewegung. Ich erinnere mich immer daran, was die Leute am Ende dieser ökumenischen Gottesdienste sagten: "Wie schön, wir müssen das öfter machen."

Für mich gibt es keine Bedingungen, Spiritualität zu leben, ohne inklusiv, offen und respektvoll gegenüber unseren Mitmenschen zu sein und dies wird durch den ökumenischen Dialog und die solidarische und liebevolle Erfahrung unserer Spiritualität erreicht, die keine Grenzen oder Barrieren hat. Ich glaube, dass die Ökumene die Mission der Kirche und der Wille Jesu Christi ist, damit jeder ein würdiges Leben führen und sich inmitten der täglichen Herausforderungen und Schwierigkeiten, in jeder Situation und jedem Kontext selbst helfen kann.

## b) Gott in uns

Dieser Satz stand in großen Lettern auf einem Plakat und konnte auf einer alten Druckmaschine gedruckt werden und erinnerte an Guttenbergs Erfindung für die Welt.

Dieser Satz kann auf verschiedene Arten gesagt werden:

Hier, in diesem Plakat, erscheint es ohne einen Punkt der Orthografie. Aber wir können einige setzen....

Wir können bestätigen, dass Gott uns vereint.

Wir können fragen: Vereint uns Gott?

Wir können betteln, Gott, vereine uns!

Wir können ausrufen: Gott vereinigt uns!

In all diesen Sätzen können wir reflektieren, wie die Ökumene in unserem Kontext verläuft, was noch fehlt, was wir als Kirchen suchen, was wir uns von unseren kirchlichen, sozialen, humanitären Beziehungen wünschen.

Wenn ich denke, dass die Ökumene für mich eine Mission ist, die Jesus Christus der Welt und den Kirchen hinterlassen hat, hat das ernste Konsequenzen in meinem Leben.

Die Werte, die mir am Herzen liegen, sind die gleichen, die der CONIC – National Council von Christian Kirchen berücksichtigt, der zur Evangelischen Kirche Lutherischen Bekenntnisses in Brasilien (IECLB) gehört:

***Ökumene, interreligiöser Dialog, Förderung und Verteidigung der Menschenrechte und Förderung einer Kultur des Friedens.***

## c) Das Bild der kanaänischen Frau und der Dialog

Die Welt ist von Anzeichen des Hasses geprägt. Brasilien wird derzeit von Hass und politischer Polarisierung überwältigt. Es gibt Krieg in der Welt, eine Zunahme von Gewalt überall. Kirchen, die auf Fundamentalismus basieren und Hass zwischen Brüdern und Frauen hervorrufen, Hass auf sich selbst, Hass zwischen Ländern und Herrschern ... Was ist unsere Rolle gegenüber diesen Kirchen?

Wir blicken zurück auf die Kultur des Friedens. Die Frage ist, wie können wir das tun? Die Antwort durchschaut, was uns verbindet. Was verbindet uns als christliche Menschen auf der ganzen Welt wirklich? Ja, es gibt viele Dinge, die uns verbinden. Aber ich möchte heute nur eines davon hervorheben: Das Wort Gottes.

Wir mögen verschiedene Interpretationen dieses Wortes haben, aber das Wort ist das gleiche heute, gestern und immer.

Deshalb stelle ich als große Freude die Momente des Bibelstudiums fest, die ich beim ÖRK erlebt habe:

Als am Morgen, nach der ersten Plenarsitzung, die Delegierten der Vollversammlung zu ihrer Arbeit, Diskussionen und Entscheidungen gingen, gingen wir, die Teilnehmer, zu den Bibelstudiengruppen. Bibeltexte, die sich auf das zentrale Thema vertiefen werden.

Besonders erwähnenswert ist einer von ihnen, der mich berührt und motiviert hat, um an der Vollversammlung teilzunehmen: Bibelstudium: Mt 15, 21-28

Diese fremde Frau bittet Jesus: "Erbarme dich meiner, Herr, Sohn Davids! Meine Tochter ist schlimm besessen". Die Beharrlichkeit der Frau bringt Jesus zum Schweigen und er sagt, dass er diese Bitte nicht erfüllen kann: „Es ist nicht

schön, das Brot der Kinder zu nehmen und den Hündlein hinzuwerfen.“ Dieses Brot symbolisiert nichts anderes als Akzeptanz und Würde.

Die Frau akzeptiert diese Antwort nicht und fährt fort zu sagen: "Ja, Meister, aber auch die Hündlein ernähren sich von den Brotkrumen, die vom Tisch fallen". Es ist, als ob sie sagte: Ich habe ein Recht auf ein würdiges Leben, denn ich bin auch eine Tochter Gottes. Auf diese Weise bittet die Frau um die Heilung der kranken Tochter. Jesus sagt: „Frau, dein Glaube ist groß. Dir geschehe, wie du willst! Und ihre Tochter war geheilt von jener Stunde an“ (Vers 28).

Die Haltung Jesu, der fremden Frau zuzuhören, ist eine neue Haltung der Gemeinschaft.

Die Ausdauer und der Glaube der Frau veränderten die Situation. Der Glaube erzeugt Ausdauer und Beharrlichkeit, nährt den Glauben, damit sich die Menschen und die Welt verändern können.

In diesem Prozess der Begegnung mit verschiedenen Menschen, geleitet vom Geist Gottes, entstehen Befreiung, Nähe, Verständnis und neues Leben.

In diesem Sinne sagte die Pastorin Abdul-Mohan von der Presbyterianischen Kirche von Trinidad und Tobago:

„Unsere Aufgabe als ökumenische Gemeinschaft ist es, durch diese kühne Liebe Christi die Brücke zwischen den anderen und uns selbst zu bauen“. Wir sind entschlossen nach dieser Versammlung, von der Feindseligkeit zur Gastfreundschaft und von der Liebe zum Handeln überzugehen.“

In der Begegnung Jesu mit der fremden Frau wich die Feindseligkeit der göttlichen Gastfreundschaft. Gott offenbart sich in der Demut des Dialogs und in der liebevollen Disposition der Gegenseitigkeit, der Liebe und des Respekts.

#### d) Frauen, Sexualität, Mission und Ökumene

Ein weiterer besonderer Punkt für mich war es, wahrnehmen zu können, wie sich Frauen in Kirchen bewegen, mit der Kraft, dem Mut und der Kreativität, mit der sie sich organisieren und für ihre Rechte kämpfen und das gleiche für alle christlichen Frauen ausweiten.

Frauen verbinden sich durch Netzwerke, Kontakte und feiern das Leben und den Glauben inmitten der Freuden und Schwierigkeiten des Lebens. Die Frage der Geschlechtergerechtigkeit, die nicht immer nur in Kirchen und Gemeinschaften steht, sollte Gegenstand der Reflexion sein, einschließlich der Ökumene.

Ein weiterer wichtiger Schritt wurde auch mit dem Dokument über die menschliche Sexualität getan, das vom ÖRK-Zentralkomitee zur Weiterarbeit genehmigt wurde, als Ergebnis des ökumenischen Kampfes für die Rechte von LGBTQIA+ Menschen. Ein wichtiges Dokument, das von 2014 bis 2022 erstellt und vom Zentralausschuss des Ökumenischen Rates der Kirchen angenommen wurde, ist eine Einladung an Kirchen und Organisationen, über Sexualität mit Ressourcen zu sprechen, die durch die Gespräche der Referenzgruppe für menschliche Sexualität aufgebaut wurden.

Sehr positiv betone ich die Möglichkeit von Begegnungen, Zusammenkünften und gemeinsamen Plänen zur Stärkung des ökumenischen Weges mit Blick auf die Zukunft, wie die portugiesisch-sprachigen Kirchen (Brasilien, Portugal, Angola, Mozambique und Osttimor). Dieses Treffen ermöglicht viele weitere Verbindungen und Partnerschaften in der ökumenischen Mission.

**Ein Bild für Ökumene:** „Afrikanische Freunde versicherten mir, dass es in vielen Muttersprachen Afrikas viele Begriffe gibt, um "Weg" und "gehen" mit unglaublichen Veränderungen zu beschreiben. Über das Gehen mit einem Kind wird in gewisser Weise gesprochen. Gehen mit den Eltern wird anders gesagt. Das Gehen mit Freunden wird in gewisser Weise gesagt. Mit einem geliebten Menschen, noch einem anderen. Aber – wie mir diese Freunde aus Afrika erzählten – trotz so vieler Worte zum "Gehen" in ihrer Sprache gibt es kein Wort für "alleine gehen"“. (Hugo Assmann)



**Segen:**

So spricht Gott zu dir:

Du bist mein Kind.

Du bist mein Ebenbild.

Du bist gesegnet.

Geh nun und tu, was die Liebe dir zeigt:

Übe die Gerechtigkeit, liebe die Güte

Und geh besonnen mit deinem Gott.

Ich werde mit dir sein.

Heute und alle Tage. Amen.

## e) Ökumene in Brasilien

In Brasilien ist das wichtigste Organ der Ökumene der Nationale Rat Christlicher Kirchen (CONIC), der im November 1982 in der Stadt Porto Alegre (RS) gegründet wurde. Ihre Mitglieder sind heute die Römisch-Apostolisch Katholische Kirche, die Evangelische Kirche Lutherischen Bekenntnisses in Brasilien, die Anglikanische Episkopalkirche Brasiliens, die Vereinigte Presbyterianische Kirche Brasiliens und die Syrjänisch-Orthodoxe Katholische Kirche von Brasilien.

**Ökumenisch zu sein ist:**

- Dialog mit den verschiedenen Traditionen des christlichen Glaubens (unser Glaube ist CHRISTLICH, aber die Traditionen und Erfahrungen des Glaubens an Jesus Christus variieren: Katholiken, Orthodoxe, Protestanten, Evangelikale, Pfingstkirchen und andere).
- Suchen die Annäherung und Vereinigung der christlichen Kirchen.
- Erkenne und respektiere, nimm als Geschenk und Gnade die Vielfalt der Kirchen und Gemeinschaften im Christentum an.
- Das Wesen unseres Glaubens an Jesus von Nazareth, den Christus, und an das, was er gelebt und verkündet hat, zu schätzen: das Reich Gottes.
- Umarme den Atem des Heiligen Geistes, der weht, wohin und wie er will, für die Männer und Frauen, auch durch die Kirchen.
- Arbeitet zusammen, Christen und andere Menschen guten Willens, um eine bessere, gerechtere und geschwisterlichere Welt aufzubauen.
- Schaffen von Räumen, dass der Dialog Unterschiede aufweist und gegenseitiges Lernen und die Überwindung der Wunden der Trennungen ermöglicht.
- Den Segen anzunehmen, der die Vielfalt der Zeugnisse davon ist, Jesus nachzufolgen und dem Evangelium zu dienen.

**Gründe, Ökumenisch zu sein:**

- Jesus bat um die Einheit seiner Jüngerinnen und Jünger (Joh 17,21).
- Kirchen, die sich gegenseitig schaden, schaden der Verkündigung des Evangeliums an diejenigen, die nicht glauben, geben dem christlichen Glauben ein Gegenzeugnis.

- Die Welt braucht diese konkrete Demonstration, dass Frieden immer möglich ist, besonders zwischen den Kirchen und Religionen.
- Die Vereinigten Kirchen haben mehr Kraft, die Gerechtigkeit zu verteidigen und wichtige Werke in der Nächstenliebe und zur Förderung der Menschen zu vollbringen.
- Freunde zu haben ist besser und schöner als Konkurrenten oder Feinde zu haben. Christus hat uns als Freund und wünscht sich unsere Einheit.
- Der Begriff „Ökumene“ stammt aus dem griechischen *oikoumene*, was die zivilisierte Welt bedeutete. In der Bibel wird das Wort *oikoumene* als die „ganze Welt“, die „ganze Erde“ und „universell“ übersetzt.

Quelle: <https://conic.org.br/portal/documentos/documentos-ecumenicos>

## 2.2. Eindrücke der ÖRK Vollversammlung in Karlsruhe 2022

von Wiebke Zimmermann, Jugenddelegierte Landeskirche Hannovers









## Bezug zu Rassismus und Kolonialismus

Veranstaltung zu „Hate Speech an Whiteness“:

- ▶ Reflexion „Critical Whiteness“, wenn wir über Rassismus sprechen
- ▶ Wie konfrontieren wir Menschen mit Fragen zu Rassismus in einem religiösen Kontext?

Impuls von der Wahl des Zentralkomitees:

- ▶ Europäische Mitgliedskirchen haben so viele Plätze wie ganze Kontinente im globalen Süden

„Racism ist a topic everywhere, no matter where we go.“

„Rassismus ist überall ein Thema, egal wohin wir gehen.“



## Wie können unsere Partnerschaften gestaltet werden?

„When it is about decision making, we still see white supremacy held up.“

„Wenn Entscheidungen getroffen werden, sehen wir Weiße Machtstrukturen immer noch aufrechterhalten.“

- ▶ Partnerschaften müssen auf Augenhöhe gestaltet werden
- ▶ Verhalten und Entscheidungen müssen in Bezug auf Rassismus hinterfragt werden
- ▶ Entscheidungen müssen gleichberechtigt getroffen werden



## Mein Fazit

- ▶ Begegnungen
- ▶ Themen
- ▶ Ergebnisse



## 2.3. Eindrücke der 11. ÖRK Vollversammlung in Karlsruhe 2022

von Thomas Fender

Pastor - Diakonie und Ökumene Diakonisches Werk der Evangelisch-reformierten Kirche

Ich starte mit einem peinlichen faux pas, der mir im Vorfeld der Vollversammlung des ÖRK unterlaufen ist. Um auf die Vollversammlung in Karlsruhe hinzuweisen habe ich vor dem Sommer alle Pfarrämter angeschrieben. Das Anschreiben fing folgendermaßen an: *Liebe Kolleginnen und Kollegen, unter der Überschrift „Die Liebe Gottes bewegt, versöhnt und eint die Welt“ findet in diesem Herbst die 11. Vollversammlung des ÖRK in Karlsruhe statt....* Kaum war die Mail raus, kam postwendend eine Mail mit der Frage, ob ich bewusst die Liebe Christi gegen die Liebe Gottes getauscht hätte. Nein, das hatte ich nicht und es war mir auch fürchterlich peinlich. Noch peinlicher war aber, dass das die einzige Reaktion gewesen ist, die ich auf mein Anschreiben bekommen habe. Wenigstens für unsere Kirche (ERK) kann ich sagen, dass Karlsruhe nur von ganz wenigen bewusst wahrgenommen worden ist.

Als Ev.-ref. Kirche waren wir mit einer kleinen Reisegruppe für 4 Tage dabei, unsere Kirchenpräsidentin, zwei Mitglieder der reformierten Jugend, ein Mitglied des Ökumene-Ausschusses und ich. Für einen Tag ist auch der Pressesprecher unserer Kirche mit dabei gewesen. Außerdem kam eine EKD Delegiert aus der Evangelisch-reformierten Kirche.

Ein erster Eindruck: Das ist eine Synode mit Begleitprogramm. Aber dieses Begleitprogramm hatte es in sich. Die Mitglieder unserer Reisegruppe haben sich mit Begeisterung auf die Angebote gestürzt. Ganz hoch im Kurs standen dabei die Morgen- und Abendandachten. Gestaltet durch VertreterInnen unterschiedlicher Kirchen aus aller Welt machten sie deutlich, dass man Vielfalt leben kann. Nach 2 ½ Corona-Jahren war zu spüren, wie wichtig die geistliche Komponente ist, die Kirche ausmacht und die in den vergangenen Jahren zu kurz gekommen ist.

Von den verabschiedeten Papieren möchte ich drei besonders hervorheben:

### "Der lebendige Planet: Auf der Suche nach einer gerechten und nachhaltigen Weltgemeinschaft"

Auf dieser Vollversammlung spielte die Klimaproblematik eine besondere Rolle. Dabei war für mich bemerkenswert, dass vulnerable Gruppen und die indigene Bevölkerung besonders in den Blick genommen wurden. Natürlich kann man zu dem Papier sagen, dass darin keine weltbewegenden Neuigkeiten zu finden sind. Das Besondere daran ist aber für mich, dass es ein internationales Papier ist, mit einer weltweiten Perspektive.

### "Krieg in der Ukraine, Frieden und Gerechtigkeit in der Region Europa"

Es war bemerkenswert, dass der ÖRK im Vorfeld nicht dem Druck derer nachgegeben hat, die auf einen Ausschluss der Russisch-orthodoxen Kirche gedrängt haben. Es ist schwierig unter der Überschrift Versöhnung und Einheit anzutreten und dann eine Kirche auszuschließen. In ihrem Statement verurteilten die Delegierten den Krieg in der Ukraine scharf und riefen die Kirchen der kriegführenden Länder dazu auf, gegen den Krieg Stellung zu beziehen:

*Einstweilen **wiederholen und bekräftigen** wir den Aufruf des Zentralausschusses an unsere christlichen Schwestern und Brüder und an die Kirchenleitung in Russland wie auch in der Ukraine, ihre Stimmen zu erheben, um gegen die anhaltenden Tötungen, die anhaltende Zerstörung, Vertreibung und Enteignung der Menschen in der Ukraine Stellung zu beziehen.*

In diesem Dokument ist auch noch ein Statement zum Thema „Migration, Fremdenfeindlichkeit und Rassismus“ enthalten.

Mit besonderer Spannung wurde in den deutschen Kirchen die Diskussion um das Statement zum Konflikt zwischen Israelis und Palästinensern erwartet.

## "Streben nach Gerechtigkeit und Frieden für alle im Nahen Osten"

Letztendlich ist es der deutschen Delegation nicht gelungen, das Wort Apartheid aus dem Statement zu streichen. In dem Statement wird aber darauf hingewiesen, dass es in dieser Frage unterschiedliche Meinungen gibt:

*Kürzlich haben zahlreiche internationale, israelische und palästinensische Menschenrechtsorganisationen und juristische Instanzen Studien und Berichte veröffentlicht, in denen steht, die Politik und die Maßnahmen Israels liefen auf eine „Apartheid“ unter dem Völkerrecht hinaus. Innerhalb dieser Vollversammlung unterstützen gewisse Kirchen und Delegierte den Gebrauch dieses Begriffs nachdrücklich und machen geltend, er erkläre die Realität der Menschen in Palästina/Israel sowie die Position unter dem Völkerrecht zutreffend, während andere den Begriff unangemessen, nicht dienlich und schmerzhaft empfinden. Wir sind in dieser Hinsicht nicht einer Meinung. Wir müssen uns nach wie vor mit diesem Problem befassen, während wir auf dem Weg der Gerechtigkeit und des Friedens weiterhin zusammenarbeiten. Wir beten, dass der ÖRK fortfährt, sichere Orte für Gespräche und Zusammenarbeit für seine Mitgliedskirchen bereitzustellen, im Streben nach Wahrheit und für die Arbeit für einen gerechten Frieden unter allen Menschen in der Region.*

An der Diskussion um dieses Statement wurde deutlich, dass nicht alle Teile der weltweiten Christenheit die europäische oder sogar die deutsche Sicht geteilt haben. Das hatte zur Folge, dass unterschiedliche Meinungen ausgehalten werden mussten. Trotzdem wusste man sich als weltweite Kirche Christi gemeinsam auf dem Weg.

Mit beitragen zur Akzeptanz unterschiedlicher Positionen sollte das „**Abstimmungsverfahren**“. Durch rote (warmes/gutes Gefühl) und blaue (kaltes/schlechtes Gefühl) Karten wurde die Stimmungslage zu bestimmten Themen abgefragt. Ans Mikrophon durften nur diejenigen, die kein gutes Gefühl hatten. Die anderen sollten vor allem hören. Wenn die Aussprache zu keiner Einigung führte, wurde das ins Statement mit aufgenommen. Damit wurde verhindert, dass eine Gruppe als Verlierer zurückblieb.

Bemerkenswert war auf dieser Vollversammlung der **Protest der Jugend**, die sich lautstark zu Wort gemeldet hat. Ihr Einsatz dafür, dass die Klimaproblematik zum entscheidenden Thema der Vollversammlung wurde, war durchaus erfolgreich. Weniger erfolgreich war ihre Forderung nach mehr Partizipation der Jugend. Die Vollversammlung blieb deutlich hinter den selbstgesetzten Zielen für die Beteiligung von jungen Menschen zurück.

In einem gewissen Gegensatz stand dazu, dass eine Reihe von Ämtern mit relativ alten Menschen besetzt worden sind. Ein Beispiel dafür ist, dass der Zentralausschuss des Ökumenischen Rats der Kirchen Bischof Dr. Heinrich Bedford-Strohm zum neuen Vorsitzenden des ÖRK-Zentralausschusses gewählt hat. Der ÖRK befindet sich zurzeit in einer Umbruchsituation. Es wurde wohl jemand gesucht, der für den Umgang mit dieser Situation die nötige Erfahrung und Autorität mitbringt.

Im Vorfeld der Vollversammlung hatte ich mich gefragt, ob wir eine solche Vollversammlung überhaupt brauchen, oder ob nicht gerade angesichts von Klimaproblematik und Corona ein digitales Format viel sinnvoller wäre.

Ich glaube, es war gut, es war richtig und wichtig, dass die ÖRK Vollversammlung in dieser Form stattgefunden hat. Denn durch diese Präsenzveranstaltung ist noch einmal viel deutlicher geworden, dass wir als weltweite Kirche Jesu Christi unterwegs sind.

Meine Forderung für die Arbeit in den Landeskirchen/der reformierten Kirche ist, dass Kirche sich noch viel stärker als bisher für Klimagerechtigkeit einsetzen muss.

## 2.4. Eindrücke der 11. ÖRK Vollversammlung in Karlsruhe 2022

### Casa Común (Almut Tobola)

#### Unser gemeinsames Haus – Casa Común

#### **Aufruf zu einem Ort der Begegnung für eine prophetische Ökumene aus Anlass der 11. Vollversammlung des Ökumenischen Rates der Kirchen (ÖRK) 2022 in Karlsruhe**

Wir, ein Kreis von ökumenischen Basisinitiativen aus der Bundesrepublik Deutschland, haben uns zusammengeschlossen, um das Großereignis des ÖRK im kommenden Jahr kritisch-konstruktiv zu begleiten. Es war dieser ÖRK, der 1983 den konziliaren Prozess gegenseitiger Verpflichtung für Gerechtigkeit, Frieden und Bewahrung der Schöpfung auf den Weg gebracht hat.

In einem ersten Schritt haben wir im April 2020 in einem – von prominenten Ökumeniker\*innen aus aller Welt unterzeichneten – offenen Brief<sup>1</sup> vor allem die deutschen Kirchen, aber auch den ÖRK sowie die ökumenische Bewegung insgesamt angemahnt, sich künftig (wieder) intensiver und entschiedener mit den Überlebensfragen von Menschheit und Schöpfung sowie ihren strukturellen Ursachen auseinander zu setzen. Denn die Ökumene hatte sich in den letzten Jahrzehnten intensiv mit den herrschenden polit-ökonomischen Verhältnissen befasst und schließlich nahezu übereinstimmend und deutlich Position bezogen.

So brandmarkte der Lutherische Weltbund die vorherrschende, sich zunehmend totalitär entfaltende Weltwirtschaftsordnung bei seiner 10. Vollversammlung als „Götzendienst“ (Winnipeg 2003); der Reformierte Weltbund bekannte auf seiner 24. Generalversammlung: „Wir glauben, dass die Integrität unseres Glaubens auf dem Spiel steht, wenn wir uns gegenüber dem heute geltenden System der neoliberalen wirtschaftlichen Globalisierung ausschweigen oder untätig verhalten“ (Accra 2004); und die 10. Vollversammlung des ÖRK entlarvte die „Herrschaft des Marktes“ als „ein globales vom Mammon bestimmtes System, das durch endlose Ausbeutung allein das grenzenlose Wachstum des Reichtums der Reichen und Mächtigen schützt“ (Busan 2013).<sup>2</sup>

Trotz der seither zu konstatierenden weiteren Verschärfung der Krise unserer Zivilisation wird diese systematisch erarbeitete Beschlusslage, die seit dem Pontifikat von Franziskus ein erfreuliches Einvernehmen mit Enzykliken und apostolischen Schreiben aufweist, zunehmend beiseite geschoben – allzu oft wohl aus Furcht vor prinzipiellen Konflikten mit politischen sowie wirtschaftlichen Entscheidungsträger\*innen.

In Anbetracht dieser misslichen Situation laden wir die ökumenische Bewegung, vor allem unsere Schwestern und Brüder im globalen Süden, ein, im Vorfeld und während des ÖRK-Treffens gemeinsam mit uns aktiv zu werden. Dazu wollen wir zunächst eine „virtuelle“ Casa Común mit Videokonferenzen, Webseiten etc. und dann während des Treffens in Karlsruhe einen realen Ort der Zusammenkunft organisieren.

Wir brauchen eine solche von prophetischem Geist getragene Initiative dringlicher denn je, weil die Erde, unser gemeinsames Haus, sich in einem immer bedrohlicheren Zustand befindet: Die Verwüstungen durch das kapitalistische Weltsystem haben im wörtlichen Sinne epidemische Züge angenommen. Die Vermögensverteilungen werden immer obszöner, die (Binnen-)Migration hat weltweit einen dramatischen Umfang angenommen, die Klimakrisen scheinen kaum noch eindämmbar, entgrenzte Kriege treffen immer stärker Zivilbevölkerungen und der Demokratie trauen immer weniger Menschen national wie transnational noch etwas zu. Viele setzen stattdessen inzwischen auf autoritäre Regime und Strukturen oder auf den einseitigen Rückzug in innere Räume – zur Freude der Herrschenden! Mit dem Propheten Jeremia könnte man laut klagen: „Ich sah die Erde, und sie war ein Tohuwabohu“ (Jer. 4,23).

Müssen wir nicht klagen wie Jeremia? Mutig die Wahrheit aussprechen? Anders als das Gros der Kirchen und gesellschaftlichen Gruppen gerade nicht vor der Übermacht der herrschenden Verhältnisse verstummen und uns anpassen? Müssen wir uns nicht mit den vielen Initiativen und Bewegungen, die es auf dieser Welt auch gibt, solidarisieren: mit der Klimagerechtigkeitsbewegung, der Frauenbewegung, den Aufständischen von Santiago de Chile bis Rojava/Kurdistan? Müssen wir, müssten die Kirchen sich nicht bedingungslos an die Seite derer stellen, die für das Recht auf Frieden, Gerechtigkeit, Gesundheit und eine Welt, die uns ernährt und die wir respektvoll erhalten, kämpfen? Müssten wir nicht gemeinsam mit ihnen Zeichen und Praxen der prophetischen Nachfolge entwickeln? Oft sind wir weit davon entfernt, oft viel zu bürgerlich geworden, manchmal auch resigniert vor der scheinbaren Übermacht der Verhältnisse und unterwerfen uns den vermeintlichen Sachzwängen, wollen viel lieber die kleinen Schritte gehen, von denen wir insgeheim doch wissen, dass sie unzureichend sind.

Casa Común, so nannte sich eine Initiative am Rande der römisch-katholischen Amazonassynode 2019, die Gläubigen und Synodalen die Möglichkeit bot, über existenzielle Themen miteinander ins Gespräch zu kommen. An diese Initiative wollen wir anknüpfen: Auch wir wollen während des Treffens des ÖRK einen Ort schaffen, in dem der Geist einer Ökumene Platz hat, die in den Kämpfen dieser Welt mutig und entschieden auf der Seite der Unterdrückten Partei ergreift und für eine Welt streitet, in der alle Menschen in Würde und Gerechtigkeit leben können.

Wir möchten Euch alle einladen, an dieser Casa Común als einem Ort der Begegnung, des Austauschs, des gemeinsamen Lernens und einer Spiritualität des Widerstandes teilzuhaben. Es soll ein Ort sein für Menschen, denen an einer mutigen Kritik der Verhältnisse gelegen ist und die nach Möglichkeiten suchen, an einer grundlegenden Veränderung zu arbeiten und sich dafür zusammenschließen wollen: Delegierte des ÖRK, Christ\*innen aus ökumenischen Basisinitiativen weltweit, Aktivist\*innen aus sozialen Bewegungen in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland wie im globalen Süden, Menschen, denen der Geist des konziliaren Prozesses am Herzen liegt, und all diejenigen, die mit uns darüber nachdenken, diskutieren und Pläne entwickeln wollen, wie und wo wir uns an den Kämpfen gegen Ungerechtigkeit und Unterdrückung heute wirksam beteiligen können.

Wir wollen nicht allein vorgeben, welche Themen wir auf die Tagesordnung setzen, mit wem wir ins Gespräch kommen und wie konkret die Tage der Begegnung in unserer Casa Común aussehen. Vielmehr wollen wir Euch einladen zu einem gemeinsamen Arbeitsprozess, in dem wir all das gemeinsam diskutieren und entwickeln wollen. Bereits im Vorfeld des ÖRK-Treffens wollen wir entlang von Sprachgruppen in Form von virtuellen Konferenzen und Strategieworkshops zu Fragen arbeiten wie: Was sollen die prioritären Themen für eine prophetische ökumenische Bewegung sein, die die Zeichen der Zeit angemessen in den Blick nimmt? Wie kann es gelingen, unsere Stimme auf dem ÖRK-Treffen hörbar zu machen?

Wir hoffen auf Eure Beteiligung, Eure Kreativität, um mit uns gemeinsam den Geist der Ökumene neu mit Leben zu füllen – für ein Leben in Fülle für alle (Joh 10,10)!

Quelle: [Aufruf-Casa-Comun-Deutsch-final.pdf \(casa-comun-2022.de\)](#)

## 3. Kirche weltweit - Welche Impulse gehen von Karlsruhe aus?

### 3.1. WCC Assembly in Germany - A miracle of the Spirit

**Von Mauro B. de Souza**, 2. Vizepräsident der Evangelischen Kirche lutherischen Bekenntnisses in Brasilien (IECLB) und Referent für Weltmission

My name is Rev. Mauro Batista de Souza. I am the Second Vice-President of the Evangelical Church of Lutheran Confession in Brazil. Since last September, member of the Central Committee of the World Council of Churches.

Thank you for the invitation. It is my pleasure to be part of this important moment. I am honored to be with such distinguished people.

I was asked to share some thoughts about my impressions on the 11<sup>th</sup> WCC General Assembly. Before I reach that point, I would like to start a little earlier in time.

I was in this meeting in Germany, prior to the assembly. It was a pre-assembly consultation. In one of the sessions this woman speaker came to the floor and started her conference saying: “my Spirit is tired; there is way too many challenges ahead; my Spirit is too tired, it seems to me I won’t be able to take it anymore.”

Wow. That hit me like a rock. That is precisely how some people feel in many places, especially in the global South. Way too many challenges, way too many problems, way too many wrongs: all kinds of injustices, climate change, gender-based violence, nationalisms, polarizations, fascism, hate speech, poverty, hunger... you name it. Seems like we are losing. The enemies are winning.

However, in that very same conference I also heard, once more, this time from another speaker, one of the biggest promises, in fact one of the biggest certainties we Christians have – we are the people of the resurrection! We keep on hoping against all odds.

See how God is gracious? God has never let us down and will never do. In John 14: Jesus says, because I live, you will live. What else do we need?

Therefore, this is the precise time, this is the right place we are called to give testimony of our faith in Jesus Christ! We are needed now more than ever before. Churches and FBOs have the opportunity to be relevant. To give testimony that another world is possible. In fact, we know how that looks like. Christ has begun it. If we could only remember that now and then.

### About the 11th WCC Assembly

Karlsruhe was my first WCC assembly. I was one of the two voting delegates from my Church. I was part of the Business Committee, Message Committee, and was the moderator of one of the 23 Ecumenical Conversations.

Considering everything that was at stake, this assembly was a miracle of the Spirit. THINK WITH ME: Surviving the pandemic, getting out of the pandemic, coming back together again, bringing 4.000 people in one place, right in the middle of a dangerous place which Europe is right now. That, my friends, is a clear sign of God's grace. We rejoice and we give thanks to God.

That assembly met at a crossroad – in time and space, in which two antagonistic, radically different projects are fighting.

- a. Barbarianism: ever-growing concentration of power and wealth, that has no regard for human dignity and life; and has no problem in using war, genocide, atrocity crimes to move forward; leaving billions of people and the natural environment at huge risk; living in order to produce someone else’s privileges;

AND

- b. Turning back to a different view; based on solidarity; on empathy, on solidarity, fraternity. This Project draws from indigenous knowledge. Living in order to live.

THIS IS THE CROSSROADS WE LIVE TODAY.

To me, the WCC Assembly is the most important religious gathering of Christianity, certainly the biggest one I have ever been part of. It is an enormous privilege to be there, observing, learning, speaking, voting on behalf of my church.

I would like to highlight a few things, in a positive way:

- a. First of all, the assembly was an opportunity to have communion, to pray, sing, discuss, agree, disagree together; the unique chance to get to know and to talk to people from literally all corners of the world that I might not ever see again.

This feeling of what it really means to be part of the body of Christ: diverse, colorful, different. Then it hit me: maybe we are not supposed to be one. We could as well just be many, and that is OK.

- b. The Assembly was a festival of diversity: different expressions of faiths, spiritualities, cosmologies, logics, ethnicities, denominational families, rhythms, looks, liturgies, traditions, opinions.
- c. I would like to highlight the powerful, wise, resilient **leadership of women** and the faithful, creative, always defeated but persistent **testimony of the young** people.
- d. The Consensus decision-making methodology used by WCC is interesting to me. How do we go about agreeing on things or – in some cases - getting out of the way so that the majority feels safe to push matters forward.
- e. Minutes and public statements are also very important. They give ground upon which churches can develop programs. Two are the most crucial to me: The Living Planet: seeking a just and sustainable community and The Things that make for Peace: moving the world to reconciliation and unity.

And, perhaps, things most of us consider burning issues, themes for further work, topics for urgent consideration: climate justice; gender justice; economic imbalances; youth in the church and in the ecumenical movement; political/social polarization; religious fundamentalisms; war and peace; the issue of displacement and migration; the political opinions on the Russian invasion to Ukraine; the situation in Palestine.

### Room for improvement:

- An assembly this size and this complex is still a place of violence; not everyone feels safe to be, to stay, to walk... let alone to speak. Therefore, there is a need to work on making the spaces safer and safer; and developing strategies for those whose knowledge and thinking framework differ from Western, North Atlantic.
- I still can feel what could be called theological colonialism. There is one mainstream theology, almost the theology with capital letters - most likely to be done by people and theologians from the Global North; and there is all other theologies named contextual, specific, particular theologies; there is a need to acknowledge that all theologies are contextual, no matter if they are written in fireplace heated offices or forged in protest marches of hunger strikes.

- On the other hand, whereas the social, diaconal, human rights approach is vital for the churches in the global South, theologians from the region could move beyond that and offer their reflections on other parts of theology.
- There is a need to improve the relationship between churches and the FBOs they have created and to great extent support. There is a need to improve dialogue and get together to empower the work. FBOs have tools, strategies, resources... the churches have the people at ground level. We must find a way to work together – even at WCC.

## FURTHER QUESTIONS

### Is the WCC still a relevant actor in the 21st century”?

YES. WCC is a reminder to the world that churches are not dead. We are very much alive. There is a lot of work to be done, yes, but the search must go on. WCC is a chance, given by God, to 352 churches showing to the world that unity, cooperation, coming together makes way better results than competing with one another. Charles Darwin was wrong. Competition kills. Cooperation enlivens.

### What is the agenda of the WCC for the coming years?

- Keep struggling for visible unity. Unity is never uniformity. Personally, I do not actually believe we should be one; we are many; we are different; we value different things; but that is precisely what makes this work worthwhile.
- Keep improving programs: fighting climate injustices, poverty, gender injustices.
- Keep working to bring silenced voices to the table: other churches; other confessional families; other voices, other thinkers, other ages.
- Improve participation of women, indigenous people, and youth at decision-making spaces.

## 3.2. And Yet it Moves: Dream and Reality of the Ecumenical Movement

Reflections on Karlsruhe Assembly (Auszüge, redaktionell gekürzt)

Dr. Dietrich Werner, Referent Theologische Grundsatzfragen bei Brot für die Welt

### Karlsruhe as a global landmark event and truly ecumenical assembly

The assembly in Karlsruhe was a historic event, not so much because it was the first *international* church convention of this size and importance to have met in Germany, but more so as it was a significant *ecumenical* gathering in the midst of a grave global crisis, in which a foretaste of the unity of the body Christ could be sensed despite all the shortcomings and visible tensions and conflicts between nations, churches and confessional families in the European continent and much beyond.

I felt reminded by the famous statement of the Life and Work conference in Oxford 1937 on Church, Community and State which met in similar, though also different historical circumstances in wrestling with the powers of the nation-state and excessive religious nationalism in that period leading to the Second World War. Oxford had made an important distinction between the terms “international” and “ecumenical”:

*“The term ‘international’ necessarily accepts the division of humankind into separate nations as a natural if not final state of affairs. The term ‘ecumenical’ refers to the expression within history of the given unity of the church. The one starts from the fact of division and the other from the fact of unity in Christ. The thought and action of the church are international in so far as the church must operate in a world in which the historical bodies share with the rest of humankind the division into national and racial groups. They are ecumenical in so far as they attempt to realize the una sacra, the fellowship who acknowledged the one Lord.”<sup>1</sup>*

Although hindered by many difficult factors (not the least of which consisting of the ongoing war between Ukraine and Russia), delayed by more than a year by a severe global pandemic which made the coming together and visa and hygiene regulations for thousands of Christians fairly unlikely even until a few months prior to the event, put at risk by limited staff and financial resources in WCC and partly having to suffer from a negative press campaign from some German media prior to the assembly accusing the WCC of being simultaneously anti-Semitic as well as belittling Putin<sup>2</sup> - despite all of this the assembly has managed to take place and to be completed successfully. And all delegations, including even the Russian Orthodox delegation, stayed until the very end. This is not to be taken for granted and can be regarded as success. It is the positive result among others of the plea of Interim General Secretary Ioan Sauca prior to the assembly - despite heavy pressures - not to expel the Russian Orthodox Church, but instead also to invite a small delegation of churches from the Ukraine (although not yet a member church) based on the key conviction that “the WCC is a free space for dialogue, and we come together not because we agree with one another but because we disagree”.<sup>3</sup> Karlsruhe has shown that the ecumenical movement still is alive and can bring in and contribute its enormous potential even in the midst of a world being at the brink of a new East – West divide, facing a substantial weakening of multilateralism and even the threat of nuclear war. Against the accusation or the suspected diagnosis articulated against the WCC several months before that the “death of ecumenism” has to be announced,<sup>4</sup> Karlsruhe has shown in several important thematic fields (e.g. Middle East, Human Sexuality, Peace

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<sup>1</sup> Quoted from Oxford Conference Life and Work 1937 in: Julio de Santa Ana: Research and Ecumenical Formation., Ecumenical Review October 1996, page 498.

<sup>2</sup> Artikel in “Die Welt” von Matthias Hamman, published a day ahead of the assembly (30.8.2022), but with firm preconceived condemnations of the whole of the assembly already: Kirchentreffen in Karlsruhe. Wenn Christen Israel anfeinden und Putin schonen, in: <https://www.welt.de/politik/deutschland/article240766471/Kirchentreffen-in-Karlsruhe-Wenn-Christen-Israel-anfeinden-und-Putin-schonen.html>

<sup>3</sup> See: <https://religionnews.com/2022/09/09/world-council-of-churches-assembly-painted-by-debate-over-russian-invasion/>

<sup>4</sup> See: <https://www.oikoumene.org/news/fr-ioan-sauca-god-is-on-the-side-of-those-who-are-suffering>



Ethics, Nationalism) and in the deep commitment and spiritual life of its participants, that the ecumenical movement is as vital, vibrant and supported by many as almost never before and presents itself as an countercultural force over against exuberant and rigid nationalisms.<sup>5</sup> In a time when global democratic standards are in recession and autocratic regimes are on the increase, the ecumenical assembly underlined that staying together in honest mutual listening, sincere dialogue and applying the principles of consensus decision making<sup>6</sup> still is possible in a global event and platform such as a churches gathering. Karlsruhe articulated the conviction: There is no alternative to ecumenism and its transnational orientation towards the common good of humanity and of all creation. However, Karlsruhe also made clear that “one of the most serious challenges facing the ecumenical movement today is to deal with tensions and divisions “within” the same family of churches, instead of “between” families of churches. There is a serious, I would say fundamental, methodological difference, between initiating and encouraging a dialogue of divided church families (what the ecumenical movement was called to do) and churches who are of the same family (what the ecumenical movement is facing today in several cases).”<sup>7</sup>

(...)

4000 participants, around 700 delegates, 352 member churches, six major assembly working commissions, 11 working sessions of the committees in just 5 days, 10 thematic and business plenaries in a short time span, around at least 60 presentations in the networking zone inside the congress center and 250 side events in places of encounters all around in Karlsruhe - this was an overwhelming and often over-demanding superlative of intercultural encounters, dialogues and key decisions, which might seem insignificant in terms of the numbers of people reached directly, but indeed was highly significant as bearing the spirit of hope, of a global longing for peace and of an amazing power of resilience in so many churches practicing democratic standards and recognition of human dignity which so many of their governments have left behind already. (...)

## The miracle of Karlsruhe: Staying together in times of brutal violence, abject poverty and mounting global tensions – and acting together as well?

The peculiar mixture of the different elements of an assembly is what makes for the unique spirit of this event: a global festival of faith and companionship, an international celebration of the essentials of Christian faith plus the highest decision-making body of the largest and most important international ecumenical organization, the WCC, – Karlsruhe was everything at the same time, therefore making it also not at all easy for journalists to grasp the specific nature and common direction of this event. The rich spiritual and worship life and also the daily home groups (where a smaller number of some 20-30 delegates and advisors would meet in the same composition throughout the assembly) were the two essentials forums which brought people together for mutual bonding, learning and embrace (not to speak of the significance of the short coffee breaks as an opportunity for mutual encounter and bonding):

*“Loving God. We gather from all over the world, from the eight regions of the World Council of Churches, from diverse contexts, every one of us created in your image.*

*We share the hope of meeting each other in the warm embrace of Christ’s love that moves us to reconciliation and unity.*

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<sup>5</sup> Dr. Agnes Abuom, Moderator of outgoing Central Committee had stated: “the Assembly is a spiritual celebration of the power of God’s love to renew our minds and hearts so that we may become a countercultural force driven by solidarity with the most vulnerable people and God’s creation.”

<sup>6</sup> The consensus decision making model moves beyond leaving behind loser and winners in a debate, See: <https://www.oikoumene.org/news/consensus-a-colourful-farewell-to-majority-rule>

<sup>7</sup> Ioan Saucă in an interview 14 April 2022, in: <https://www.oikoumene.org/news/fr-ioan-sauca-god-is-on-the-side-of-those-who-are-suffering>

*We share the burden and the pain of this time of the Covid pandemic. We share the burden and the pain of armed conflicts and their consequences in deaths, destruction and forced migration. We share the burden and the pain of the preexisting plagues of injustice, structural poverty, violence, and a creation that suffers.”<sup>8</sup>*

(...)

## The struggle and the powerlessness of Karlsruhe: Continuing the line of Amsterdam 1948 “War is contrary to the will of God”

The war situation in Eastern Europe left a strong mark on the programmatic proceedings of the assembly – criticized by some delegates from the South also for focusing attention too much on Europe. As far as I heard there were about 37 different versions of the program outline for the thematic plenary on Europe – indicating the amount of controversies and diplomatic tuning which was taking place being the surface. At the end a clear focus on voices from war-torn Ukraine dominated – certainly a result of the commitment to give the voices of victims a clear voice and visibility. Other perspectives, for instance on the impressive history of ecumenical achievements in the European context in past decades despite demographic shrinking of church membership, did not get the chance of being articulated to the global audience.<sup>9</sup> In the European plenary two shocking voices called for major attention, one from Ukrainian archbishop Yevstratiy of Chernihiv and Nizhy and the other from Prof. Sergii Bortnyk from the Ukrainian Orthodox Church who both reported about the impact and brutality of the Russian invasion into the Ukraine.<sup>10</sup> One of the big disappointments during the course of the assembly was then that at no time there was any official response to be heard from the Russian Orthodox Delegation with regard to their fellow Christian brothers from the Ukraine. Already at the opening plenary the German president Steinmeier in quite un-diplomatic and very clear and explicit language as a Christian as well as a head of state had called the assembly to distance itself from any political misuse of the language of faith and to learn from the lessons which Germany had gone through in many years of suffering during the period of Nazi terror:

*"We must never allow religion, which is intended to build up, encourage and edify people, to become a means to humiliate others, a tool of hatred and violence... The heads of the Russian Orthodox Church are currently leading their members and their entire church down a dangerous, indeed blasphemous path that goes against all that they believe. They are justifying a war of aggression against Ukraine – against their own and our own brothers and sisters in the faith. We have to speak out, also here in this room, in this Assembly, against this stance, this propaganda targeting the freedom and rights of the citizens of another country, this nationalism, which arbitrarily claims that a dictatorship's imperial dreams of hegemony are God's will.”<sup>11</sup>*

While some voices remained critical over against these words viewing them as less helpful to allow for real and open dialogue between both sides and the Russian delegation dismissed them as part of a Western political campaign against Russia<sup>12</sup>, I cannot but the words of Steinmeier to remain as a critical reminder to the WCC and the ecumenical

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<sup>8</sup> Oasis of Peace. Spiritual Life Resources, WCC 2022, page 30

<sup>9</sup> It was to a certain extent understandable, but also a pity that remarkable achievements in the European context like the history of three European Ecumenical Christian Assemblies since 1989, the impact and role of the Charta Oecumenica from 2001 or the Growth in Agreement on the doctrine of justification between the Roman Catholic Church 1999 did not play any significant role.

See: <https://www.ceceurope.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/07/ChartaOecumenica.pdf>;  
<https://faithineurope.org.uk/category/topic/third-european-ecumenical-assembly-sibiu/>;  
see: <https://www.lutheranworld.org/jddj>

<sup>10</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-Yp8ji2xrns>;

<https://www.oikoumene.org/news/churches-stress-the-need-for-reconciliation-unity-and-peacebuilding-in-ukraine>

<sup>11</sup> <https://www.bundespraesident.de/SharedDocs/Reden/EN/Frank-Walter-Steinmeier/Reden/2022/220831-VV-OeKR.html>

<sup>12</sup> Metropolitan Antony of Moscow, leader of the Russian Orthodox delegation in Karlsruhe, has reacted furiously to the accusations. In his view, Steinmeier "completely overlooked the humanitarian interference of the Moscow Patriarchate in the confrontation in Ukraine". Steinmeier's words would also be an example of "unadulterated pressure by a high-ranking

movement as a whole that real dialogue should be honest and should have bridge-builders from both sides. Thus he was not something imposing on the assembly as churches as a head of state which was alien to the task of the church<sup>13</sup>, but as a Christian himself reminded the assembly of its own original mandate:

*“Yes, time and again Christians are called to be bridge-builders. That is and remains one of our most important tasks. But building bridges requires willingness on both sides of the river; a bridge cannot be constructed if one side tears down the pillars that support it. In the run-up to the Assembly, the opinion was expressed that dialogue at least should be made possible. Yes, but dialogue is not an end in itself. Dialogue must bring to light what is happening. Dialogue must draw attention to injustice, must identify both victims and perpetrators – and their henchmen.”<sup>14</sup>*

As the aspiration and hope for real and honest dialogue was not met in Karlsruhe (except a few individual and private talks) as both sides remained in a spirit of mutual isolation and no visible gestures of good will were exchanged between the ROK delegation and the representatives of churches from the Ukraine, much needs to be done to outline a clear roadmap for real and concrete steps for further stages in a process of rapprochement between both sides in the post assembly period. Still a vital service of the WCC is urgently needed in this regard if the Council should remain credible and not just celebrates the affirmed membership of ROC as an achievement in itself.<sup>15</sup>

The final declaration of Karlsruhe assembly on the war in the Ukraine<sup>16</sup> reiterated strongly the rejection of the military invasion as being contrary to the word of God which had been articulated already in the orthodox pre-assembly.<sup>17</sup> It was a pity that the deep-seated feelings of cultural and political estrangement, perceptions of western dominance and military expansion of the NATO alliance to the East which is sensed by many Russian Christians which are rarely listened to in Western media could not be articulated and brought into some fruitful dialogue in a protected space of dialogue Karlsruhe. At the same time also the well-formulated theological criticism which was articulated before the assembly by a number of orthodox diaspora and church theologians over against the concept of “russkij mir”<sup>18</sup> despite its very wide circulation was not placed at any official agenda of the assembly for more critical and open dialogue, but was kept to side forums in Karlsruhe which were not primarily attended by delegates.<sup>19</sup> In the same sense of failing to table to real debates and controversies on the open platform of the assembly the WCC did not

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government representative on the oldest intra-Christian organisation, of interference in the internal affairs of the World Council and of an attempt to call into question the peace-making and politically neutral character of its work. The Metropolitan expressed the hope that the World Council would remain an "independent platform for dialogue", see in:

<https://cne.news/artikel/1649-russian-orthodox-church-furious-after-world-council-criticises-kirill>;

also in: <https://www.katholisch.de/artikel/40804-russisch-orthodoxe-kirche-protestiert-gegen-steinmeier-rede>

<sup>13</sup> Some participants mistakenly took the speech of president Steinmeier as an indication that in Germany there is still some kind of state-church model at work where the head of state could dictate the church what to say and to do. Nothing could be farer from reality. See: Joachim Ochel: Church State Relationships in Germany, in [https://www.oekumene-ack.de/fileadmin/user\\_upload/Nationale\\_Kircheneraete/Ochel\\_Church\\_State\\_Relations.pdf](https://www.oekumene-ack.de/fileadmin/user_upload/Nationale_Kircheneraete/Ochel_Church_State_Relations.pdf)

<sup>14</sup> <https://www.bundespraesident.de/SharedDocs/Reden/EN/Frank-Walter-Steinmeier/Reden/2022/220831-VV-OeKR.html>

<sup>15</sup> See: <https://blackchristiannews.com/2022/09/russian-orthodox-church-keeps-membership-in-the-world-council-of-churches-despite-controversy-over-war-in-ukraine/>

<sup>16</sup> See: <https://www.oikoumene.org/news/wcc-statement-on-war-in-ukraine-deplores-illegal-and-unjustifiable-invasion-renews-calls-for-ceasefire>

<sup>17</sup> See: “During our deliberations, there was an expression of grave concern over the armed conflict in Ukraine that has already claimed many people’s lives. The participants in the meeting have been unanimous in condemning the wars and call upon all the parties involved in the conflicts to do everything within their power for the urgent establishment of peace and for ensuring safety in Ukraine, Russia, Europe, and the whole world. We also condemn systematic campaigns of disinformation that promote divisions and hatred. In this time of great hardships, we are called to lift up fervent prayers to Christ the Saviour so that hatred may not take hold of human souls and hearts, but, instead, love and fraternal communion may return to the brotherly peoples in anguish.” published from May 18,2022 (and causing the relegation of Hilarion, Head of the Department of External Affairs in Moscow Patriarchate), in: <https://orthochristian.com/146211.html>

<sup>18</sup> See: <https://publicorthodoxy.org/2022/03/13/a-declaration-on-the-russian-world-russkii-mir-teaching/>;

see on the very controversial inner-orthodox reception of this critical paper: <https://orthochristian.com/145475.html>

<sup>19</sup> <https://acadimia.org/en/news-announcements/press/1035-political-theology-nationalism-social-justice-and-eschatology-protestant-and-orthodox-approaches>

manage to give public attention to the important “Statement of solidarity with the Orthodox declaration on the “Russian World” (russkii mir) teaching, and against Christian Nationalism and New Totalitarianism” which was signed by a number of important theologians from both orthodox and protestant background (including Jürgen Moltmann) and had actually taken up very similar arguments against the confusion of Christian identity with aggressive and imperialist concepts of nationalism and totalitarianism which were already articulated during the Oxford conference in 1937.<sup>20</sup>

The concluding statement of the Public Issues Committee of the Karlsruhe assembly, however, “*The things that make for peace – Moving the world to reconciliation and unity*” includes a number of crucial commitments and recommendations in terms of a post-assembly peace ethics working agenda which are worth being noted. The document also refers to a rather critical assessment of reactions to armed conflict which primarily focus on delivery of arms and military escalation and a plea to take up the tradition of shaping the framework of a common security concept in Europe which had been developed by OSCE in the 90ies.<sup>21</sup> It remains to be seen whether in the dialogues which still need to be planned between WCC, ROC, Ukrainian churches as well as other ecumenical partners earlier crucial theological statements on ecumenical peace ethics which had been developed and articulated on all relevant sides (including the famous conference in Kingston, Jamaica, 2011, on a theology of just peace<sup>22</sup> and regional and denominational statements on ecumenical peace ethics<sup>23</sup>) will fall into ecumenical amnesia as their language is not in harmony with some of the positions taken today. Alternatively we need to see whether these positional papers can bear new fruits again by being brought into a joint dialogue with all related parties in a deliberate WCC road map for political peace ethics with the Russian Orthodox Church and all other churches in the region in a process towards moving for a post-war scenario in the Ukraine and elsewhere.

## Common Conviction of Karlsruhe: Kairos for Creation – We are running out of time

Already some months before the assembly the General Secretary of WCC had declared convincingly that time has come for a new initiative of WCC and its member churches facing the urgent threats of a global climate emergency: “We must act now: If we don’t change our behavior, in 50 years our planet will be uninhabitable”.<sup>24</sup> It was highlighted that the WCC is the only faith based-organization that has had a permanent presence in the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) process. The WCC also had been present at all the UN climate conferences since the 1992 Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro. The WCC played a prominent role in highlighting dangers to the environment even before the Rio summit. Therefore, the assembly statement<sup>25</sup> which was drafted by the Public Issues Committee on the global climate crisis was awaited for with high expectancy in Germany and much beyond. It is striking that the statement three times uses the clause “We are running out of time” which is borrowed

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<sup>20</sup> See: <https://religioninpraxis.com/a-statement-of-solidarity-with-the-orthodox-declaration-on-the-russian-world-russkii-mir-teaching-and-against-christian-nationalism-and-new-totalitarianism/>

<sup>21</sup> See the clause: The WCC “**appeals** for much greater financial and practical support by the international community for peace-building and peace-making rather than for division and military confrontation, and **underlines** the important role of women and youth as peacemakers, and of non-violent conflict transformation. Reasserts the ecumenical movement’s rejection and denunciation of war as contrary to the will of God. Calls, for a global ceasefire, as an urgent moral imperative, in all armed conflicts around the world, and for parties to such conflicts to engage and persist in dialogue and negotiations until just and sustainable peace can be achieved, and to abstain from war.”, in: <https://www.oikoumene.org/news/wcc-assembly-statement-calls-for-global-ceasefire-renewed-commitment-to-peace>

<sup>22</sup> See: <https://www.oikoumene.org/resources/documents/statement-on-the-way-of-just-peace>

<sup>23</sup> See EKD paper from Synod in Dresden 2019 on a Theology of Just Peace (“Kirche eines gerechten Friedens werden”) or the Orthodox Statement 2020 on “Towards the Life of this World – Ecumenical Patriarchate on Social Ethics of the Orthodox Church”.

<sup>24</sup> See: <https://www.oikoumene.org/news/world-council-of-churches-leader-looks-to-assembly-in-germany-to-mobilize-action-for-climate-justice>

<sup>25</sup> <https://www.oikoumene.org/resources/documents/the-living-planet-seeking-a-just-and-sustainable-global-community>

from the Wuppertal conference Kairos for Creation which was done together by Bread for the World, UEM, EKD and EMW in 2019:

***“We are running out of time** for this metanoia to take place. The Central Committee, meeting in June this year, noted the Pacific Island of Kiribati, facing rising sea-levels, had declared a State of Natural Disaster due to a prolonged drought. As we gather for the 11th Assembly of the World Council of Churches, our sisters and brothers in Pakistan face the heaviest rainfall in living memory and flooding that has killed 1,162 people, injured 3,554 and displaced 33 million. Four years of failed rains in the Horn of Africa have put 22 million people at risk of starvation. In Europe, a drought unprecedented in 500 years has affected large swathes of the continent. Such extreme weather, and accompanying humanitarian crises are the alarm bells of a Climate Emergency. Moreover, instability and increased competition for resources resulting from climate change greatly exacerbates conflict risks. In addition, climate change is a public health emergency, having been recognized as a leading cause of human mortality and morbidity. Climate-induced displacement, relocation or migration is no longer a matter of if or when, but is occurring now.*

***We are running out of time.** We must repent from our continuing human selfishness, greed, denial of facts and apathy, which threatens the life of all creation.*

***We are running out of time.** This Assembly is the last chance we have to act together to prevent the planet from becoming uninhabitable. In particular, no further delay is possible if we are to have any chance of staying within the safer limit of +1.5°C global warming and of avoiding vastly more catastrophic climate change.”<sup>26</sup>*

The key recommendation demands a clear priority setting for all WCC member churches and the WCC itself in terms of focussing on issues related to the global climate crisis:

***“The Assembly joins the WCC central committee in urging all member churches and ecumenical partners around the world to give the climate emergency the priority attention that a crisis of such unprecedented and all-encompassing dimensions deserves, both in word and deed, and to amplify their efforts to demand the necessary action by their respective governments within the necessary timeframe to limit global warming to 1.5°C and to meet historic responsibilities to poorer, more vulnerable nations and communities.”<sup>27</sup>***

It will be of crucial importance to monitor the implementation of four key practical recommendations which have been set at the end of the statement

- *“Urgently establishing a **Commission on Climate Change and Sustainable Development Emergency and Economic Injustice**, convened by the WCC in collaboration with ecumenical partners, in order to monitor progress and to advise on measures to accelerate our efforts for the protection of God’s creation, and for the promotion of just and sustainable communities.*
- *Declaring an **Ecumenical Decade of repentance and action for a just and flourishing planet.***
- *To set an example by committing **WCC to reduce its institutional carbon footprint to net-zero by 2030.***
- *Establishing **strict limitations on travel for WCC purposes**, preferring virtual means of consultation and encounter. These online engagements and the use of electronic devices by WCC should also be mindful of ongoing environmental costs and the impact on children forced into extractive industries for rare earth minerals.”<sup>28</sup>*

There was surprisingly little time during the assembly in Karlsruhe to really discuss the challenges for the implementation of this demanding new global ecological agenda for the ecumenical movement concerning the commitment to tackle the root causes of the global climate emergency. Also, the remarkable Faith and Order Study

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<sup>26</sup> See: <https://www.oikoumene.org/resources/documents/the-living-planet-seeking-a-just-and-sustainable-global-community>

<sup>27</sup> See: <https://www.oikoumene.org/resources/documents/the-living-planet-seeking-a-just-and-sustainable-global-community>

<sup>28</sup> See: <https://www.oikoumene.org/resources/documents/the-living-planet-seeking-a-just-and-sustainable-global-community>

on “Cultivate and Care. Justice for and within Creation”<sup>29</sup> which was published prior to the assembly as the first theological Faith and Order study on a joint theological language of all Christian denominations on Creation Care – together with the new volume “International Handbook on Creation Care and Eco-Diakonia”<sup>30</sup>, which was presented to GETI and on other occasions - would have deserved more attention.

What does it mean to reorder future priorities for finances and staff in WCC’s work and in related ecumenical agencies if this agenda really has to be taken up? What kind of time plan is required in case the statement “we are running out of time” is true? What are the potentials and concrete models of cooperation with other faith traditions and with the UNEP decade on reconstruction of global eco-systems?<sup>31</sup> Are regional and local interfaith councils and associations properly equipped and engaged in issues relating to the global environmental and climate emergency? Are our research hubs, theological education institutions, scholarship funds and international exchange and research programs sufficiently geared towards the field of ecology and religion if this massive mobilization of the religious sector and “greening of religions” for the survival of this planet can become a reality and not just an appeal? These questions remain on the post-assembly agenda.

And yet it moves – this could be clearly seen during the Karlsruhe assembly, regarding the ecological dimension of the global ecumenical movement. However, dream and reality of the mandate and actual work of the ecumenical movement still are in tension with each other and often fall apart. For the WCC to become an avantgarde again in the area of ecological ethics and eco-system’s reconstruction like it used to be in the midst of the 70ies when the concept of sustainable development was actually born and formulated during a WCC conference on Faith, Science and the Future (Bukarest 1974), there is need for a deliberate working process and design for more and broader involvement of both grassroots groups, research and church related agencies.

## Witnessing to Peace and Justice in the Holy Land – Is Israel an Apartheid State? Or: What language helps for real progress in a situation of continued occupation and increasing polarization?

The issues of justice and peace in the Middle East has been a priority on the agenda of WCC since decades<sup>32</sup>, almost no assembly passed without having a statement on the Middle East.<sup>33</sup> Relating to the region where Christianity was born and is increasingly threatened in its survival due to migration, violence, instability and discrimination has always been a sensitive issue for the ecumenical family. In the month before the assembly this was one of the issues most debated in press articles as the perceptions and framework from which churches for instance from South Africa and the US are viewing this situation are different in language than the specific historical and hermeneutical conditions the conflict is viewed by churches from Germany. In German churches the perceptions of the Middle East context and language used for prophetic witness cannot but also take into account the history of the Shoah and Christian anti-judaism which is a global, not just a German issue. This leads to sensitivities which these churches have to bring into the international ecumenical dialogue without being hesitant to name injustices in the occupation of Palestine boldly and clearly as what they are: grave violations of international law and human rights. The United Church of Christ Israel Palestine network had published a strong statement in 2021<sup>34</sup> calling Israel’s occupation and separation policy an expression of Apartheid and as a sin in trying to take up and echo the Palestinian “Cry for Hope” from

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<sup>29</sup> <https://www.oikoumene.org/resources/publications/cultivate-and-care>

<sup>30</sup> <https://www.regnumbooks.net/products/international-handbook-on-creation-care-and-eco-diakonia>

<sup>31</sup> <https://www.decadeonrestoration.org/>

<sup>32</sup> A survey from 2017 had summarized all key position of WCC concerning the conflict in Israel-Palestine, see: <https://www.oikoumene.org/resources/documents/wcc-policy-on-palestine-and-israel-1948-2016-summary>

<sup>33</sup> See: Middle East statement from Vancouver assembly 1983, in:

<https://www.oikoumene.org/resources/documents/statement-on-the-middle-east>;

Middle East statement from Busan assembly 2013: <https://www.oikoumene.org/resources/documents/statement-affirming-the-christian-presence-and-witness-in-the-middle-east>;

<sup>34</sup> See: <https://www.palestineportal.org/news-center/2021-community-news/ucc-resolution-2021/>

2021.<sup>35</sup> In a similar direction The Network of Palestinian Christians in the US based Palestinian Alliance of Christians for Peace on 3<sup>rd</sup> of September had sent an open letter to the WCC assembly pointing to the fact that both Human Rights Watch, Amnesty International as well as the Israelian Human Rights Organization Betsalem had called the current grave human rights violations an “Apartheid” situation and asked the assembly to “name and condemn Israeli apartheid against Palestinians and to bring to bear the same level of pressure and activism against Israeli apartheid as it did to South African apartheid.”<sup>36</sup> Some of those churches which belong to Kairos Palestina South Africa had clearly stated that the ongoing conflict in the Middle East has to be interpreted and named as a racial conflict with the term apartheid already applied since years (2010) and therefore demanded a more visible commitment of WCC to the BDS movement.<sup>37</sup> Many had expected that this could become an unsolvable challenge and could even cause a major breaking apart of the ecumenical fellowship in the assembly.

Interim General Secretary Ion Sauca took a bold step at the beginning in addressing the issues upfront in his major report which could be discussed in the plenary.<sup>38</sup> Under the heading of “visiting the wounds” he referred to the official visit of a delegation prior to the assembly in Israel and Palestine in July 2022. *“Our message and our visit of solidarity was meant to reassure our sisters and brothers in the Holy Land that they are not alone and abandoned, that the WCC continues to remain with them and to accompany them, and advocate for and defend their dignity and human rights when faced with hardships and tribulations.”*<sup>39</sup>

Ion Sauca summarized the key elements of the WCC position strongly rejecting the accusation that the WCC is anti-Semitic. The core convictions are included in No 66 and 67:

*“66. To those who accuse WCC as being anti-Semitic, I would say boldly that already in 1948 the WCC acknowledged the history of Christian anti-Judaism and denounced antisemitism as a sin. And while we are critical of some policies of the State of Israel, again since 1948, the WCC recognizes the State of Israel and respects the right of Israel to defend itself and take care of its citizens, within the perspective of international law. We oppose, reject, condemn, and denounce all forms of antisemitism. 67. At the same time, we support equal human rights for Palestinians and oppose, reject, condemn, and denounce situations when these are not respected. Protesting against human rights violations when they occur and asking the Israeli government to protect all its people, whether they be Israeli or Palestinians, has nothing to do with antisemitism; it is a natural and normal exercise in any democratic society. We ask that the dignity and human rights of Palestinians are respected. We ask for the equal treatment of all citizens. We call firmly and consistently for the end of occupation. We have repeatedly affirmed the two state policy based on international law. We want to see Israelis and Palestinians cohabiting together on the path to peace, reconciliation, to just peace.”*<sup>40</sup>

The report then directly addressed the most controversial issue:

*“68. At the same time, some groups on the Palestinian side and some groups in the West have challenged us for being soft and not bold enough in denouncing and condemning human rights violations. Furthermore, based on the recent report of Amnesty International, we received letters, requests and proposals from some in our WCC constituency, in particular from South Africa and a few from the West, to change WCC policy at the assembly in Karlsruhe and denounce Israel as an apartheid state because of its treatment of Palestinians. Support for BDS (Disinvestment and*

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<sup>35</sup> <https://myemail.constantcontact.com/Global-Kairos-Cry-for-Hope--Anti-racism-resources--new-book-from-Palestine--stop-Annexation-bill.html?soid=1102837461929&aid=cC59blUVeGw>

<sup>36</sup> See: [https://www.kairospalestine.ps/images/PCAP\\_Statement\\_To\\_WCC\\_11th\\_Assembly-2022-09-03.pdf](https://www.kairospalestine.ps/images/PCAP_Statement_To_WCC_11th_Assembly-2022-09-03.pdf)

<sup>37</sup> See: <https://kairossouthernafrika.wordpress.com/>;

see already in 2010: <https://www.oikoumene.org/resources/documents/south-african-response-to-kairos-palestine-document>

<sup>38</sup> Surprisingly the space provided for a general debate in the plenary after both reports from Moderator Agnes Abuom and General Secretary Ion Sauca was used actively only by very few delegates, thus diminishing the time and space for controversial dialogue in the later business sessions.

<sup>39</sup> Report of the Acting General Secretary of WCC, in: <https://www.oikoumene.org/sites/default/files/2022-08/A02-Report-of-the-Acting%20General-Secretary-ENG.pdf>

<sup>40</sup> Report of the Acting General Secretary of WCC, in: <https://www.oikoumene.org/sites/default/files/2022-08/A02-Report-of-the-Acting%20General-Secretary-ENG.pdf>

*Sanctions) as a way of resistance and pressure on the state of Israel toward the end of occupation and respect of human rights has also been proposed and reaffirmed. All these developments are complex and sensitive with profound implications.*<sup>41</sup>

It was very clear that these reflections of the General Secretary were not meant to silence, ignore or even sideline any of the Palestine sentiments of the brutality of ongoing repression in the Palestine territories, but were meant as a nuanced approach to listen to the voices of churches on the ground:

*“69. All, with no exception, spoke about the difficult situation of the Palestinians, about cases of violations of human rights the impunity of the aggressive acts of settlers, the demolition of houses, violations of properties and expropriations, restrictions of access to religious sites, and attempts to remove the Christian presence from the Old City of Jerusalem. All were grateful for the work of the WCC and our presence in the region, valued the work of the WCC Jerusalem Liaison Office and the Ecumenical Accompaniment Programme in Palestine and Israel (and emphasized how important this work is for the local communities).*

*71. Yet, when it came to the issues of apartheid and BDS they were all very cautious and nuanced. They asked the WCC to continue advocating for and defending their cause and rights but to be careful about speaking on their behalf and proposing terminology and actions that would close the doors to dialogue and threaten their very existence in the Holy Land. What do you expect we be achieved if the WCC assembly calls Israel an apartheid state, I was asked? How do you want us to support BDS which means boycotting ourselves, the local businesses of our people, our own existence here? Please, be careful with what you propose on our behalf, I was told; think of our situation here and our future. This was the message I brought back from this visit.”<sup>42</sup>*

In the Public Issues Committee the final declaration on the situation of justice and peace in the Middle East was discussed with great sensitivity and nuanced argumentation while trying to listen to all sides. The final declaration adopted in Karlsruhe does not fall short in calling structural injustice what it is:

*“In Palestine/Israel, there is another wave of forced displacement of Palestinian people from their homes - sometimes on multiple occasions since 1948 – as in Sheikh Jarrah, Silwan, the South Hebron Hills, as well as in the rest of Area C. The expanding Israeli settlements in the occupied Palestinian territories, especially those encircling East Jerusalem, are illegal under international law and threaten fundamental demographic and political changes to the region. Moreover, they have so undermined any practical prospect of a two-state solution that this path towards a just peace now seems increasingly unviable. The expansion of the settlements and the increased military presence that accompanies them have brought more suffering for Palestinian communities, with more encroachment on and seizure of Palestinian lands and properties, and increased systematic harassment and attacks by settlers (especially in the absence of the protective presence of international visitors during the Covid-19 pandemic).”<sup>43</sup>*

The WCC also had articulated a consensus already earlier that to a limited extend, not as a general measure against Israel as such, campaigns of boycotting goods from occupied territories could be a meaningful part of Christian witness in a situation of ongoing grave structural injustice of the occupation:

*“Certain economic measures are legitimate forms of non-violent resistance to occupation and positive pressure for peace. WCC supports an international boycott of goods and services from illegal Israeli settlements in the OPT. WCC considers targeted economic measures an important non-violent strategy for promoting peace and abating violence, and encourages member churches to avoid investments or other economic links to illegal activities on occupied territory.”<sup>44</sup>*

In an effort to do justice to both sides, the final statement made a reference to both sides, rather than to embark on a detailed analysis of the argumentation from both sides. It referred on the one hand to those who strongly felt, that

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<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

<sup>42</sup> <https://www.oikoumene.org/sites/default/files/2022-08/A02-Report-of-the-Acting%20General-Secretary-ENG.pdf>

<sup>43</sup> See: <https://www.oikoumene.org/resources/documents/seeking-justice-and-peace-for-all-in-the-middle-east>

<sup>44</sup> See from 2017: <https://www.oikoumene.org/resources/documents/wcc-policy-on-palestine-and-israel-1948-2016-summary>; see also: <https://www.oikoumene.org/news/to-media-wcc-responds-to-false-media-reporting-on-israel-and-bds>



calling the state of Israel an Apartheid state has become a necessity out of Christian responsibility for their point of view. On the other hand it also referred to those who feared that this would not help the situation of the Palestinians and would instead transfer a concept born out of a different context while emphasizing the need to call all structural injustice occurring in as strong terms as possible. A clear reference however is made explicitly to several initiatives demanding for a strong rejection of Israel's government by being called an apartheid state. But this language was not adopted by WCC on its own and for the whole of the ecumenical fellowship as churches represented by WCC as there was no consensus in this regard:

*"Recently, numerous international, Israeli and Palestinian human rights organizations and legal bodies have published studies and reports describing the policies and actions of Israel as amounting to "apartheid" under international law. Within this Assembly, some churches and delegates strongly support the utilization of this term as accurately describing the reality of the people in Palestine/Israel and the position under international law, while others find it inappropriate, unhelpful and painful. We are not of one mind on this matter. We must continue to struggle with this issue, while we continue working together on this journey of justice and peace. We pray that the WCC continues to provide a safe space for its member churches for conversation and collaboration in pursuing truth, and working for a just peace among all people of the region."*<sup>45</sup>

It has often been overheard that the statement also has called strongly for a reform of the Palestinian Authority in order to counter its own human rights violations and to make it more accountable to basic principles of transparency and human dignity:

*"For Palestinian people, the situation is sadly compounded by the grave failings of the Palestinian authorities, including reprisals against opposition leaders and the lack of legal and democratic accountability."*<sup>46</sup>

While it is true that the different layers and levels of the public debate during the assembly were not sufficiently providing space and time to discuss the deeply rooted and serious arguments which informed both positions and the political as well as pastoral implications of both options for the situation of churches in the Middle East on the ground, the deliberate attempt of the assembly leadership based on the consensus principle definitely was not to side-line any position and the intention not to silence any Palestinian position could clearly be recognized. However, time management did not allow for a more open and frank debate on the respected detailed argumentation from both positions in the plenary thus not giving a sufficient chance to hear the desperate feeling of many Palestinian Christians, that their cry for hope (2020)<sup>47</sup> was not sufficiently listened to in the wider ecumenical community and therefore they felt pressed to use a more strong language of denouncing an oppressive policy of violent segregation. As a result very severe criticism towards both WCC and EKD churches from Christian Palestine Peace Network<sup>48</sup> and American churches<sup>49</sup> were raised soon after the assembly sadly mounting even to the blunt and misleading accusation that the election of a German Bishop as Moderator to the Central Committee needs to be seen as clear indication that a deliberate (German) strategy of silencing and prevention of listening to the suffering of Palestinians would continue in WCC.<sup>50</sup> Solidarity with the Palestinian suffering, however, is not necessarily identical with radicalized political rhetoric and mutual accusations, which can unintentionally close all remaining space for Palestinian civil society organizations and also the important international EAPPI program to be supported by churches in the ecumenical movement. And what is gained if one adopts a radical rhetoric but at the same time destroys the common platform which is needed for really being effective in moving towards some tangible change in the powerful and complex political settings in the region which everybody concerned should know about? The

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<sup>45</sup> See: <https://www.oikoumene.org/resources/documents/seeking-justice-and-peace-for-all-in-the-middle-east>

<sup>46</sup> See: <https://www.oikoumene.org/resources/documents/seeking-justice-and-peace-for-all-in-the-middle-east>

<sup>47</sup> See: <https://www.cryforhope.org/>

<sup>48</sup> [https://www.kairospalestine.ps/images/EKD\\_Protest\\_Letter.pdf](https://www.kairospalestine.ps/images/EKD_Protest_Letter.pdf)

<sup>49</sup> See: <https://mondoweiss.net/2022/09/world-council-of-churches-general-assembly-puts-israeli-apartheid-on-the-global-churches-table/>

<sup>50</sup> See „Open Protest letter EKD“ last paragraph, Protest of the Kairos Palestine Solidarity Network: EKD distances itself from international law and pressures WCC to suppress Palestinian voice, in: [https://www.kairospalestine.ps/images/EKD\\_Protest\\_Letter.pdf](https://www.kairospalestine.ps/images/EKD_Protest_Letter.pdf)

conflict about the “Apartheid” terminology also reveals how much still needs to be done in the post-Karlsruhe period in terms of bringing all sides to one common table, to understand the common Christian responsibility to counter both any real antisemitism as well as to allow for any weakening of criticism over against settlement policies by the arbitrary use of the antisemitism accusation. The need to avoid ideological hardening or the radicalization of certain campaigns which are born out of understandable feelings of frustration and the increased sense of powerlessness and stalemate is clearly on the table as well as the need to move beyond the current impasse in the Middle East which benefits only those who hold the power.<sup>51</sup>

## Healing the wounds of past and present – racism, xenophobia and antisemitism

Although not so much present during the plenary sessions, the issues of racism, xenophobia and white supremacy attitudes played a major role in several instances and dialogues in Karlsruhe. The WCC was recalling its clear stance against racism since the Uppsala assembly in 1968 as well as its long years of struggle against the apartheid regime in South Africa by stating a new resolve to intensify its program against racism, discrimination and xenophobia.<sup>52</sup> The history of the slave trade of several centuries and colonialism still is related to wounds afflicted, which demand truth telling, listening to the wounds and healing of memories for many:

*“Indeed, racism, xenophobia, and other forms of discrimination and hatred have become even more salient in recent years, due to the negative use of social media and anti-foreigner populist nationalist movements in several countries. Racism and xenophobia intersect with discrimination based on ethnicity, national origin, religion, economic status, gender, disability and other factors that intensify systems of exclusion, such as statelessness, that deny people their dignity as human beings created in the Imago Dei. Over the centuries, people of African descent, those on the African continent and in the diaspora, have suffered racism, xenophobia and discrimination at the hands of all other groups within the human family. Racist-based enslavement of Africans, especially during the transatlantic slave trade of the 15th -19th centuries, saw whole communities of African peoples being destroyed by slave traders. Many African lives were lost due to the inhumane conditions they suffered as they were forcibly uprooted and trafficked across the Atlantic.”<sup>53</sup>*

Remarkably enough the assembly at the same time also countered the critical voice of those who had launched a preconceived campaign against the WCC labelling it as antisemitic even before the assembly had actually started. In this direction the same document stated with great clarity also the following:

*“Meeting in the country where, during the Second World War, the Holocaust of the Jews was conceived and from which it was perpetrated, we acknowledge the legitimate fears of Jewish people around the world of the shortness of the trajectory from antisemitic attitudes and hate speech to genocide. Populist nationalist forces have in many places unleashed and encouraged latent antisemitism, with the consequence of increased violent attacks as well as discrimination against Jewish people and communities. The churches have a continuing responsibility to confront the scourge of antisemitism, given the historic role of churches in promoting and disseminating it. Though ancient in its origins, antisemitism remains an ever-present threat, returning in new forms and through new voices in every generation. Here in Karlsruhe, we reaffirm the categorical denunciation by the WCC’s founding Assembly in Amsterdam of antisemitism as sin against God and humanity.”<sup>54</sup>*

It is remarkable that this commitment was not put into question by anybody but was passed unanimously - although less quoted in the press. It can be taken for almost certain that the related practical recommendations passed and

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<sup>51</sup> See for the further post-assembly debate: <https://www.sonntagsblatt.de/artikel/debatte/die-karlsruher-weltversammlung-und-der-kampf-um-den-begriff-apartheidstaat>

<sup>52</sup> See: <https://www.oikoumene.org/what-we-do/racism-discrimination-and-xenophobia>

<sup>53</sup> Statement on confronting racism and xenophobia, overcoming discrimination, ensuring belonging. WCC Assembly document PIC 01.5 rev., from Assembly App

<sup>54</sup> See: <https://www.oikoumene.org/resources/documents/statement-on-confronting-racism-and-xenophobia-overcoming-discrimination-ensuring-belonging>

added at the end of this declaration from the PIC will still keep the global ecumenical movement busy and more deeply engaged in the years to come:

*“Acknowledges that racism and xenophobia still impact many communities and individuals in all regions, and intersect toxically with other forms of discrimination, and therefore commends the WCC for establishing a new transversal programme on racism, xenophobia and related discriminations. Encourages this ecumenical body to revisit the complicity of some religious bodies in the painful past of enslavement, colonialism, and its current expressions to journey towards repentance, confession, reparations, reconciliation and healing.”<sup>55</sup>*

## Karlsruhe and the inter-generational conflict: Youth demanding more participation in the ecumenical movement

The Ecumenical Youth Gathering (EYG), attended by around 200 young participants, was one of the six pre-assemblies in Karlsruhe<sup>56</sup> and a powerful platform for young ecumenists to engage with each other and with the assembly theme. The impressive lamentations articulated together in the EYG Final Message exposed a profound list of how the younger generations experiences suffering of this earth and suppression of human dignity as major burden on their ability to develop a positive future prospect for their lives.<sup>57</sup> Their message were quite clear: “The youth called upon the WCC to provide a meaningful space for an equal representation of young people in all its processes, to establish a permanent youth desk focused on advocacy and reconciliation towards unity, and to listen actively to the cries of the young people, especially those in oppressed communities and those fighting for climate justice.”<sup>58</sup> With the generation of young people in the age group between 15 and 30 being disproportionately strong in churches of Africa and Asia (where sometimes up to 45% of the population is young, whereas in some of the “older” churches like in Germany youth is only about 10%)<sup>59</sup> the intergenerational conflicts gained more momentum in recent decades as the accessibility of representation and seats in both the churches and in ecumenical bodies like the WCC constantly is an issue. Although 25% of the seats in the new Central Committee according to decisions of that same body were supposed to be allocated to young candidates only the target of 13% of youth was reached after complicated efforts of the nominations committee to convince national delegations to make place for younger representatives and not just send their elder church representatives. The protest against this situation, which was not so much an issue and problem with the leading bodies and committees of the assembly, but of the sending and nominating churches was a brave and remarkable action of young delegates on the open stage of one of the business

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<sup>55</sup> Statement on confronting racism and xenophobia, overcoming discrimination, ensuring belonging. WCC Assembly document PIC 01.5 rev., from Assembly App

<sup>56</sup> See: <https://www.oikoumene.org/about-the-wcc/organizational-structure/assembly#pre-assemblies>; unfortunately the important messages of the six pre-assemblies while being received by the assembly as part of the programme guidelines report could not be presented and formally discussed in the plenary. See: “The PGC also reflected on the outcomes of the pre-assemblies of Just Community of Women and Men, Ecumenical Youth Gathering, Ecumenical Disabilities Advocacy Network (EDAN), and Indigenous Peoples, as well as the pre-assembly of specialized ministries, which was held online in March 2022. The PGC is grateful for the important work of these pre-assemblies, as well as their outcomes and on-going work which will be important for future programmatic work”, in: Report Program Guidelines Committee Point No 5, in: <https://www.oikoumene.org/sites/default/files/2022-09/PGC%2001%20rev%20Report%20of%20the%20Programme%20Guidelines%20Committee.pdf>

<sup>57</sup> See: The EYG Message can be found under: <https://www.oikoumene.org/sites/default/files/2022-09/PRE-EYG%20Message%20from%20the%20Ecumenical%20Youth%20Gathering%20rev.pdf>

<sup>58</sup> See: <https://www.oikoumene.org/news/choose-the-power-of-love-pre-assemblies-deliver-powerful-calls>;

<sup>59</sup> See the following facts: The percentage of the German population aged 15 to 24 has reached its lowest point since the beginning of current records in 1950, according to data published by the Federal Statistical Office of Germany, Destatis. Although the German population as a whole has grown, surpassing 83.2 million for the first time at the end of 2021, only 10% of those were in the key age group of 15- to 24-year-olds. In: <https://www.dw.com/en/germany-number-of-young-people-falls-to-record-low/a-62584549>

sessions. They had articulated themselves also convincingly before the assembly.<sup>60</sup> The proposal to add more seats to the numbers of representatives in the Central Committee and to have additional youth representatives and/or to add eight voluntary youth presidents from different regions to the eight presidents elected already are included in the special statement of the youth which is recorded as appendix to the report of the Policy Reference committee.<sup>61</sup> This has to be taken up by the newly elected Central Committee in 2023.

On the other hand, Karlsruhe was not discouraging at all in terms of the role of young leaders: The GETI Project<sup>62</sup> which was invented and brought into the spectrum of regular assembly and conferences activities of WCC this time brought together some 200 young ecumenical theologians plus theological facilitators and senior lecturers which shared in a program, both a distant learning web-based phase as well as a residential phase in an academy hotel in Karlsruhe which as ideally equipped for such a highly demanding exercise of intercultural learning, listening and theological dialogue. Planned by an International Planning Group under the leadership of Dr. Kuzipa Nalwamba a unique group emerged and convinced by its sharp questions, well-articulated comments to lectures and a remarkable eagerness to learn from each other: There is hope for the forthcoming new leadership generation in the younger generation if we experience something like GETI – and this included several cases and persons who had participated already in the first GETI program in Busan, South Korea, and now served as facilitators, lecturers or delegates in the assembly.

(...)

### The added value and surplus of God's promise: And yet the it moves and transforms the world – continuing the ecumenical pilgrimage for justice, reconciliation and unity

No assembly is a perfect image of the ecclesial dream of ecumenism, a comprehensive realization of the prayer “that all may be one so that the world may believe”. However, Karlsruhe in deed was another important and successful, on the whole credible and strong reminder of the living dynamic of the ecumenical dream, which is part of the work of the Holy Spirit and often can be only affirmed and discerned in looking back after a while in a spirit of prayer and spiritual discernment of what an assembly actually has brought forward. The message of the assembly has pointed to the reality of this dream as being incorporated in the continuation of the ecumenical pilgrimage for justice, reconciliation and unity, which is as urgently needed as never before. It stated:

*“Amid all our diversity, we have relearned in our assembly that there is a pilgrimage of justice, reconciliation, and unity to be undertaken together.*

- *Meeting together in Germany, we learn the cost of war and the possibility of reconciliation;*
- *Hearing the word of God together, we recognize our common calling;*
- *Listening and talking together, we become closer neighbours;*
- *Lamenting together, we open ourselves to each other's pain and suffering;*
- *Working together, we consent to common action;*
- *Celebrating together, we delight in each other's joys and hopes;*
- *Praying together, we discover the richness of our traditions and the pain of our divisions.”<sup>63</sup>*

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<sup>60</sup> See: Joy Eva Bohol and Benjamin Simon (eds): Let the Waves Roar. Perspectives of young prophetic voices in the ecumenical movement, Geneva 2021

<sup>61</sup> Report of Policy Reference Committee, page 6, in: <https://www.oikoumene.org/sites/default/files/2022-09/PRC01rev1-Report-of-the-Policy-Reference-Committe.pdf>

<sup>62</sup> See: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RtltPP1ABmw;>

<https://www.oikoumene.org/what-we-do/ecumenical-theological-education-ete#global-ecumenical-theological-institute>

<sup>63</sup> <https://www.oikoumene.org/resources/documents/message-of-the-wcc-11th-assembly-a-call-to-act-together>

Fernando Enns and others have articulated a lot of creative ideas and ecumenical wisdom in crafting an “ecumenical theology of companionship”<sup>64</sup> through which churches of different cultural and political contexts can accompany each other, stimulate, encourage, but also criticize and challenge each other. The Program Guidelines Committee envisioned a re-shaping of an Ecumenical Pilgrimage for Justice, Reconciliation and Unity as the inner core of a process of renewal and common within the common fellowship:

*“The beginning of our work has relationship building at its heart, but we want to go even further and revive a sense that the fellowship is a movement, even a prophetic movement. We do not want to lose the sense that we are ‘moving’ and that we are on a journey of justice and peace, prepared to struggle for them. Deepened relationships should lead to radical change, to conversion, reconciliation, justice, and reparations. We affirm an ecumenism of the heart, but also an ecumenism of the feet in which we walk in the sandals of Jesus Christ.”*<sup>65</sup>

Some of the most urgent areas and countries in which a continuation of this pilgrimage is an urgent priority according to my view are the situations of Ukraine/Russia, Myanmar, Horn of Africa, Zimbabwe, Haiti, Pakistan, India, China and Brazil. With these alone an ecumenical agenda for post assembly follow up could be filled for at least three years already.

It is a sign of the vitality of the ecumenical movement that despite adverse circumstances the governing bodies of WCC were able to smoothly handle not only the election of a new Central Committee including a new Moderator and Vice-Moderator<sup>66</sup>, but also to appoint a new General Secretary and new faces for all the three key leadership positions within the WCC (accomplished already some months before the assembly in 2022) – one of the most comprehensive and simultaneous occasions of a complete generation change in the leadership of the global ecumenical movement we ever had.

The WCC needs prayers and support of all those trying to follow the dynamic of Christ’s love which moves, unites and transforms this world – as it is stated in one of the hymns of the worship book of Karlsruhe:

*“May deep wisdom guide us as together*

*We move forward engaging in your loving activity.*

*We trust in your great faithfulness.*

*Amen”.*<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> Fernando Enns: Toward an Ecumenical Theology of Companionship, Ec. Rev. April 2022, 268ff

<sup>65</sup> Report of Program Guidelines Committee, No. 27, in: <https://www.oikoumene.org/sites/default/files/2022-09/PGC%2001%20rev%20Report%20of%20the%20Programme%20%20Guidelines%20Committee.pdf>

<sup>66</sup> <https://www.oikoumene.org/news/bishop-dr-heinrich-bedford-strohm-elected-as-wcc-moderator-we-are-one-church-in-this-global-world>

<sup>67</sup> Oasis of Peace, Hymn Book from Karlsruhe page 286



Arbeitskreis Gerechtigkeit, Frieden, Bewahrung der Schöpfung  
der Konföderation evangelischer Kirchen in Niedersachsen

c/o

Tobias Schäfer-Sell  
Ev.-luth. Missionswerkes in Niedersachsen  
Büro für Internationale kirchliche Zusammenarbeit  
Otto-Brenner-Str. 9  
30159 Hannover  
t.schaefer(at)elm-mission(dot)net