

Call to Recommitment
Mid-Term of the Decade to Overcome Violence 2001-2010:
Churches Seeking Reconciliation and Peace

This document attempts to capture the learnings, the dynamics and the results of the first part of the Decade. Moreover, it is a reminder that the Decade is by no means over. In September 2005 it was submitted to the executive committee which affirmed its content with the understanding that it will be given to the delegates in the context of the plenary on the Decade to Overcome Violence as a call to recommitment for the churches.

Nothing is so characteristically Christian as being a peace-maker. (St Basil the Great)

Five years have passed since the World Council of Churches launched the Decade to Overcome Violence. The assembly at Porto Alegre marks the mid-term and offers an opportunity to celebrate what has been achieved, share experiences, make an interim assessment, and refocus the course to be followed during the second five-year period.

The goals of overcoming violence and building a culture of peace imply spiritual, theological and practical challenges for our churches which touch us in the centre of what it means to be church. The debate about the whole spectrum of the spirit and logic of violence has started, but the course we have entered requires persistence and endurance.

It is encouraging that the impulse of the Decade has been taken up in an ever-growing number of churches and regions. Bonds of ecumenical solidarity in the search for reconciliation and peace have been built and strengthened: new initiatives around the world have started, new alliances in peace-building have emerged, new theological reflection is being undertaken and a growing number of Christians are rediscovering a spirituality of non-violence.

Inter-religious dialogue about the hidden connections between religion and violence has become one of the foci of the Decade. This is true in particular for dialogue between Christians and Muslims. The trust that has been built through patient dialogue and practical cooperation for the common good may prevent religion from being used as a weapon.

During the first half of the Decade we were confronted with cruel terrorist attacks, which have provoked wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. The spirit, logic and practice of violence manifested themselves again in an unexpected dimension. The massive efforts for strengthening security in the context of the so-called “fight against terrorism” have led to a noticeable arms proliferation and a growth in the general militarization of the world. While we are beginning to discern in more depth the ethical demands of the responsibility to protect those who cannot protect themselves, we are convinced that international terrorism is not being overcome with military means. At the same time we acknowledge that more people are becoming victims of violence in civil and local conflicts which are being fought with light and small weapons. This remains a strong challenge to the churches together.

The concern for security has become the dominant motif for individual as well as social and political decisions. “Human security” is the fruit of just relationships in community. We acknowledge that security is increasingly being threatened through the effects of economic globalization. Therefore, the search for an “Alternative Globalization Addressing Peoples and Earth” has to be understood as a decisive contribution to the continuation of the Decade.

The respect for human dignity, the concern for the well-being of the neighbour and the active promotion of the common good are imperatives of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Men and women are created equally in the image of God and justified by grace. Therefore, human rights are a basic element in preventing violence at all levels, individual, interpersonal and collective, and especially violence against women and children. This must include the effort to build and develop the rule of law everywhere. We shall further pursue the understanding of “restorative” or “transformative” justice with the aim of establishing viable and just relationships in communities.

To relinquish any theological and ethical justification of violence calls for discernment that draws its strength from a spirituality and discipleship of active non-violence. We have committed ourselves to a profound common ethical-theological reflection and advocacy for non-violent conflict prevention, civilian conflict management and peace consolidation. The praxis of non-violence must be rooted in a spirituality that acknowledges one’s own vulnerability; that encourages and empowers the powerless to be able to face up to those who misuse their power; that trusts the active presence of the power of God in human conflicts and therefore is able to transcend the seeming lack of alternatives in situations of violence.

During the second half of the Decade we will increase our efforts to work towards firmer alliances and more effective links between churches, networks and movements. We will support and coordinate common projects, which are aimed at building up structures, instruments and communities of non-

violent, civilian conflict management. The “ecumenical space” offered by the Decade needs to be shaped through mutual encounters, including governmental and non-governmental organizations.

Our goal remains to move the search for reconciliation and peace “from the periphery to the centre of the life and witness of the church”. Peace-building in non-violent ways is a Christian core virtue and an imperative of the gospel message itself. We are determined to become what we are called to be: “ambassadors of reconciliation” (2 Cor. 5). This is the mission of healing, including responsible accompaniment for those who are voiceless as well as speaking truth to those in power. We will reject every attempt to use violence and fear as tools of politics.

The ecumenical fellowship of churches strongly manifests the conviction that the communion of all saints which is a gift from God and rooted in God’s triune life can overcome the culture of enmity and exclusion which continuously leads into the vicious circles of violence. It has become in itself an image for the possibilities of reconciled living together while recognizing continuing diversities. If this community becomes an advocate of reconciliation for all people in all places who suffer from violence, and presents active non-violent ways of resolving conflict, we will indeed become a credible witness for the hope that is within us, building a culture of peace and reconciliation for all of creation.

There is no need to tell how the loving-kindness of Christ comes bathed in peace. Therefore we must learn to cease from strife, whether against ourselves or against one another, or against the angels, and instead to labour together even with the angels for the accomplishment of God’s will, in accordance with the providential purpose of Jesus who works all things in all and makes peace, unutterable and foreordained from eternity, and reconciles us to himself and, in himself, to the Father. Concerning these supernatural gifts enough has been said with confirmation drawn from the holy testimony of the scriptures. (Dionysius the Areopagite)

We pray: God, in your grace, transform us, transform the world.