

Remarks by Mr. **Yorgo Lemopoulos**,
Deputy General Secretary, World Council of Churches,
at the presentation to the WCC of the WMD Commission's Final Report
by Commission Chairman, Dr **Hans Blix**.
Geneva, Ecumenical Center, 15 June 2006, 18:00 hours

Ambassador Blix, Distinguished Guests, Colleagues, Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is our privilege to welcome you to the World Council of Churches, Dr Blix, as Chairperson of The Weapons of Mass Destruction Commission. I bring you greetings from our General Secretary, Rev Dr Samuel Kobia, who very much welcomes your visit and that the Commission's timely and important work is being shared with the Vatican, the Organization of the Islamic Conference and the WCC.

When you enter this house, you are on friendly soil. In the mission and the mind of the organizations based here, this has always been a zone free of weapons of any kind.

The World Council of Churches was conceived just before the mass destruction of World War Two and began its life just after Hiroshima. For the 58 years of its existence, churches united in the WCC have challenged the arms race and been dedicated to disarmament.

We would like to receive the WMD Commission report with *a few* of the words that churches use on the subject.

WCC governing bodies addressing the issue have been both realistic and brave. Speaking from a moral and global perspective and seeking unity among churches, the WCC has developed a forward-looking attitude—sometimes ahead of its time.

At its first General Assembly, in Amsterdam, the WCC said the indiscriminate destruction of atomic weapons and “the part which war plays in our present international life is a sin against God and a degradation of man”.

By the mid-1950s, the WCC was already looking beyond nuclear weapons, calling that era “an age of fear” and noting that “True peace cannot rest on fear.” The main elements the churches offered at that time were to become part of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty 15 years later:

- a new international order
- with the elimination and prohibition of weapons of mass destruction and
- a mechanism of effective international inspections and control.

As your report makes clear, these elements have fresh relevance today.

In the 1960s, among other steps, the WCC urged no first use and abandoning a “balance of terror.”

In the 1980s the WCC called for a nuclear freeze and reduction of stocks.

The Statements in this [orange] book are often in close harmony with your group's recommendations, for example, on use by states or non-state actors, weapons systems, proliferation and elimination.

Three months ago the most recent WCC Assembly said "in the nuclear age God...has granted humanity many days of grace" and that one shared principle of world religions applies to all weapons of mass destruction and is "stronger than any 'balance of terror'... namely: if we do not want nuclear weapons used against us, our nation cannot use nuclear weapons against others."

The Assembly urged churches to "raise awareness in [younger] generations with no memory of what [nuclear] weapons do". It recommended much greater international support for disarmament and compliance mechanisms including the IAEA.

The Commission and its report, 'Weapons of Terror', is realistic and sobering. Our times demand nothing less. But we also notice a spirit of courage and possibility, and encouragement for people to dedicate themselves to disarmament.

There is appreciation of civil society as a constituency for arms control and of an educated public as a force for change. Thus it is fitting to share this reception with the members and guests of the NGO Committee for Disarmament, who have spent their day at the Conference on Disarmament.

The Commission is a state-supported disarmament initiative and in this we see a link. This house owes much to the international commitment, the unflagging partnership and the unstinting generosity of the church in your country, the Church of Sweden. We see a link between the global ecumenical commitment of the Church of Sweden and the global security commitment of the Government of Sweden. For its sponsorship *at this time in history* of a commission on weapons of mass destruction, we offer heartfelt thanks for your government's action.

We will receive this report on behalf of the hundreds of millions of members in the churches of the WCC. They are parishioners but also citizens in 150 different countries around the world, including the countries of the WMD Commissioners.

There is an enduring commitment within churches to mobilize ethical, spiritual and political energy to meet the new challenges posed by weapons of mass destruction. Our strength in working against nuclear and other weapons has been to seek unity. When the churches can speak in unity they make a difference.

Welcome to you and to members of the Commission staff. Your report has implications for the world and we will affirm its message in churches around the world.