

Break Down the Walls - End Racism and Racial Discrimination

Message from the Conference on Racism and related forms of discrimination and exclusion
(Doorn, Holland - 14-17 June 2009)

Called together by the Programme to Combat Racism (PCR) of the World Council of Churches (WCC) and based upon our understandings of the basic principles of our faith, we believe that all Christians have a common responsibility to work for racial justice and inclusion, and with those suffering racial discrimination and exclusion, such as Dalits, migrants, people of African descent, Roma, indigenous communities and the Palestinian people.

1. We call upon the World Council of Churches to renew and refocus its priorities so as to initiate a new churches' movement to address racism, casteism and related forms of exclusion in the new context of global economic and environmental crisis, and also resurgent nationalism. This movement should be based on the lived experience of people and communities directly affected by these processes of exclusion and injustice. It should engage the communities within civil society already seeking racial, economic and environmental justice, reach out to other church constituencies beyond the membership of the WCC, and focus especially on youth and children. We therefore call upon the WCC to initiate a Decade for Overcoming Racism and Creating Just and Inclusive Communities.

2. We request the WCC to urge the Indian churches to address the issue of caste discrimination as a key priority.

3. The Programme to Combat Racism has played an historic role in inspiring a generation of anti-racist struggle in the churches. The PCR's history is an invaluable resource for the churches for the ongoing struggle, and we request the WCC to document its history and significance in a form that can be easily shared – ideally as a short video, distributed as DVD and/or online. PCR-inspired actions and other relevant initiatives and materials in many churches around the world have not yet been gathered as a collective resource for the future. We call for the establishment of a means (preferably online) for gathering these materials and resources and making them accessible to churches and others around the world.

4. We recommend that the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (21 March) be adopted as an annual ecumenical event, with the churches developing, sharing and disseminating relevant liturgies, prayers and other materials for the occasion.

5. We believe that it is necessary to develop a new articulation of the ecumenical commitment to challenging discrimination and promoting racial justice and inclusion, using especially visual/graphic image and popular cultural expression, and urge the WCC to address this.

6. We consider that we as churches and individual Christians should consciously reflect on the ways in which we perpetuate exclusion and racist discrimination through misuse of Scripture, and through traditions, attitudes and practices of exclusion – and should seek to cleanse the church of these tendencies. Essential to achieving this objective will be the promotion of multicultural, multigenerational and multicontextual biblical interpretation of Bible passages dealing with issues of racism and exclusion based on descent and the creation of resources by the churches to address this.

7. We need new and challenging theological and anthropological approaches towards racial justice, drawing on existing discourses from the perspective of the excluded and oppressed, adopting a human rights approach and deconstructing the position of the dominant.

8. We must all promote sensitivity to and awareness of the racist subtext of common expressions in which black and white are used as metaphors for negative and positive values, and seek the elimination of these expressions from our usage, especially by those in positions of leadership and influence in church and society.

Theological Comment

In a world groaning in the pain of brokenness, exploitation, and fragmentation of the wounded and outcast humanity, God demonstrates the divine love by accompanying humanity in this time and place. Integral to creation, God created human beings, all different, with equal rights and responsibilities in the household (*oikos*) of God. Human beings living in interdependence manifests the divine presence. The African understanding of *Ubuntu* calls us to be fully human in direct connection with the other. The other person is not a stranger. He or she is not apart from us: *I am because you are*. We cannot be without the other. We belong together.

Our vocation as Christian communities is to practice a theology of solidarity and hospitality as embodied in the prophetic discipleship of Jesus Christ. This theology is characterized by integrity, honesty, humility, compassion, love, justice and reconciliation. We believe dignity and human rights to be at the heart of the Christian Gospel and, as concretized by International Conventions, the most constructive framework for the Church's advocacy work. The principle of anti-discrimination is integral to equity for all.

The people of God is a community of love and freedom, it is a Church which includes the oppressed and disenfranchised and those victimized by racist policies and institutions. It transcends all boundaries and rejects prejudiced ideologies, to build new, *just and inclusive* communities. We commit ourselves to live by the power of love and not the love of power.

Who we are, why we are here and what we believe

We are women and men, young and old, lay persons and clergy, church administrators and activists, academics and theologians from the four corners of the Earth. Fifty of us met together for three days invited by the World Council of Churches on the 40th Anniversary of the Programme to Combat Racism and also on the 33rd anniversary of the Soweto uprising and the 20th anniversary of the fall of the Berlin wall. We celebrated the significant contribution of the PCR to ending Apartheid and encouraging the churches to address racism. We recognized however that we have failed to eradicate racism. We also challenged the exclusion from this debate of any relevant situation, including that of the Palestinian people.

We believe this is a *kairos* moment for committed action by the churches and beyond, it's God's special time, a time of crisis and opportunity. **We believe** that this is a moment where we are invited by God to commit ourselves to be instruments of change in the church and the wider society. **We believe** God is calling members of the Church to action with and on behalf of the marginalized, the poor and the many who face exclusion. **We believe** that in answering this call, we have the faith and the resources to make a difference in the global community in which we reside.

We believe God says: Enough is Enough!

We have raped the planet. We have stolen each others' possessions. Out of our greed, we have created an ideology of exclusion and discrimination. The global economic crisis, climate change and systemic exclusion - generating desperation and increased migration - is the three-fold crisis creating the *kairos* and calling us to repentance. We have failed to love our neighbours as ourselves. We must repent of the sin of racism, and of consumerism and capitalism. All are rebellion against God.

God says: Enough is Enough.

It is time for a new movement. It is time for a new world, as a just and inclusive community. It is a time for a new spirituality that values *ubuntu* over individualism, interdependence over nationalism, and the content of character over skin colour. This new spirituality calls us to embrace the presence of God in all Creation as we say: I am because Creation is.

God says: Enough is Enough.

We have resources of resistance. We have resources of sustainability. We have resources of faith which root our hope in a future that promises equity and wholeness for all God's people.

Confession

As the church we are members of communities targeted by judgments made on the basis of caste, race, gender, xenophobia and related forms of intolerance. Simultaneously, we confess that we are communities that often make false judgments of others, we are guilty and we seek to protect our privilege through exclusion of others.

We acknowledge that as churches we have often been constricted by our tradition, institutions and structures of power. Sometimes, working in the interest of the state and of capital, we have failed to challenge the laws, institutions and structures of power and oppression. We have failed to live out the vision of a household of God and our shared understandings of hospitality, inclusiveness and justice within our faith, and with other faiths.

We long to participate in God's promise of a reconciled world. We confess that we are both oppressors and oppressed, and acknowledge our need for repentance. We confess the need for repair and reparation as we commit to our wholeness and unity.

Our Commitment

We here gathered commit to expanding our repertoires in working to transform our churches, communities and the world for a racially just future.

We call on and invite the participation of all sectors of the ecumenical movement to, as the WCC said at the WCAR 2001, "earnestly strive to break the cycles of global racism and assist the oppressed to achieve self determination".

