

The Things That Make For Peace: Moving the World to Reconciliation and Unity

*"The Things That Make For Peace: Moving the World to Reconciliation and Unity",
Statement of the WCC 11th Assembly in Karlsruhe, Germany*

Assembly

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If you, even you, had only recognized on this day the things that make for peace! But now they are hidden from your eyes. (Luke 19:42)

As we meet in the 11th Assembly of the World Council of Churches (WCC), in Karlsruhe, Germany, almost three years since the emergence of the global Covid-19 pandemic, we must acknowledge with deep pain and dismay that violence and conflict continue to impact vulnerable communities, especially the elderly, women, children and youth.

The life and work of the WCC since the 10th Assembly in Busan has been framed as a 'Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace', drawing especially on the '[Ecumenical Call to Just Peace](#)' and the Busan Assembly '[Statement on the Way of Just Peace](#)'. The Statement on the Way of Just Peace describes just peace as "a journey into God's purpose for humanity and all creation" and expresses its vision in four dimensions: just peace in the community, just peace with the earth, just peace in the marketplace, and just peace among the nations.

We meet in a time of renewed and escalating global polarization, reconfiguration of governance and geopolitical alignments, division, confrontation, and militarization - as well as of continuing military occupations in situations such as the Occupied Palestinian Territories and Cyprus - with all the appalling risks that attend this context. In the community, grave concerns are being raised in the ecumenical fellowship about the instrumentalization of religious language, authority, and leadership to justify, support or "bless" armed aggression or any kind of violence and oppression, in sharp contrast to the Christian calling to be peacemakers and contradicting core ecumenical principles.

We understand that making peace involves addressing racism, xenophobia, antisemitism, hate speech and other forms of hatred of the other (all of which have increased and intensified during these years, in large part encouraged by populist nationalist movements); crisis and competition for essential resources for life; economic injustice and inequality in the marketplace; interstate conflicts and re-emergence of war; and the raising of the spectre of nuclear war.

These threats to peace fundamentally violate the core tenets of the Christian faith. The calling to dialogue, encounter and the pursuit of mutual understanding is the very essence of ecumenism and central to peace-making. It is the role of churches to embody *“Christ’s love [that] moves the world to reconciliation and unity.”*

The 11th Assembly of the WCC therefore:

Affirms the demand for prophetic truth telling, **recognizes** the urgent need for a deep renewed dialogue within the ecumenical movement on the implications of our Christian faith for our witness for peace in the world and for our ecumenical commitment to the [“Way of Just Peace”](#), and **urges** the WCC to exercise leadership, in cooperation with others, to convene such dialogue.

Strongly affirms the commitment of the WCC and its member churches to peace-making through inter-religious dialogue and cooperation at all levels, as a key contribution to countering the forces of division, confrontation, polarization, and injustice, and **urges** the WCC and the entire ecumenical fellowship to continue and deepen this engagement.

Rejects the polarization and division of the human community and **declares** our commitment to stay together as an ecumenical fellowship, and to grapple with the threats and challenges to peace, justice, human security and environmental sustainability through dialogue, encounter, the pursuit of mutual understanding, and cooperation, rather than through exclusion and confrontation.

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.

Urges WCC member churches and partners to actively support and accompany the Korean churches in their advocacy by carrying forward the heritage of the Busan Assembly affirmed by the [Statement on Peace and Reunification of the Korean Peninsula](#).

Recognizes [Article 9 of the Constitution of Japan](#) as an important heritage from the ashes of the Second World War, and a unique resource for peace globally. We encourage Christians and all people around the world to stand with the churches and civil society of Japan in their efforts to protect this heritage, and commend this principle to other nations.

Calls for renewed commitment by the WCC and the ecumenical movement to revive diakonia and respond to the emergencies and humanitarian needs brought about by violence and instability in places such as Ethiopia, Nigeria, Cameroon, South Sudan, the Central African Republic, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Mozambique, Sudan, Myanmar, Sri Lanka, the Philippines and West Papua, and to stand in Christian solidarity with the churches and people of all affected countries and regions.

Recognizes WCC accompaniment during the peace and reconciliation process in Colombia through [DiPaz](#) (Interchurch Dialogue for Peace in Colombia). As the [new government](#) brings new hope for the continuation of the peace process, the Assembly urges the WCC and the international community to reaffirm commitment and solidarity with the Colombian government, churches and people and to collaborate in the design, implementation, advocacy and funding for the construction of peace in the country.

Urges support for the churches and peoples of Syria, Cuba, Venezuela and Zimbabwe in the midst of oppression due to international sanctions that affect these populations' human rights and dignity. Churches have been crucial agents working for better relationships despite the limitations and barriers caused by sanctions. We ***call for*** the removal of Cuba from the list of countries that sponsor terrorism and to accompany the churches as prophetic voices of peace, hope, cooperation and mutual respect.

Invites reflection and discussion within and among the member churches of the WCC fellowship on Christian principles and perspectives with regard to the doctrine of nuclear deterrence.

Urges all states that have not already done so to sign and ratify the [Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons](#), especially nuclear umbrella states and nuclear-armed states that are the source of this global threat.

Calls for full implementation of commitments made under other disarmament conventions, especially the [Arms Trade Treaty](#) (ATT), the [Landmine Ban Treaty](#) and the [Convention on Cluster Munitions](#), as well as the [Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons](#) (CCW) and article VI of the [Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons](#) (NPT) (which commits its 191 member states - including the five main nuclear-weapon states - to pursuing negotiations in good faith on effective measures for complete nuclear disarmament).

Expresses strong support for a global pre-emptive ban on autonomous weapons systems ('Killer Robots' and drones) and **urges** states to desist from obstructing progress to this ban and to engage in good faith negotiations for this purpose.

Denounces the military industrial complex which profits from the economics of war and violence and the proliferation and export of weapons, and **calls** for a moratorium, and ultimately an end, to the export of the weapons and armaments that fuel conflicts around the world.

Demands full legal accountability for all perpetrators of war crimes, crimes against humanity and other serious violations of international humanitarian and human rights law - including for attacks on civilians and civilian infrastructure, sexual and gender-based violence in conflict, the use of food and access to food, water and medical care as weapons of war, and any use of nuclear and other weapons of mass destruction.

Denounces every instance of the violation of freedom of religion or belief, and **affirms** the freedom of religion or belief for all people of faith and people of no faith everywhere, and the right of conscientious objection, for a peaceful world.

Calls for greatly increased investment by governments and other actors in the foundations of true human security and global stability, including for urgent action to achieve climate justice and to avert the threat of catastrophic climate change, and for a just transition to renewable energy, for the elimination of

extreme poverty, for sustainable development, and for measures to control rampant inequality, including through tax justice and reparations - all of which if not addressed will fuel conflict.

Supports renewed efforts to reform and improve the effectiveness of UN and other intergovernmental instruments for promoting peace and human security, and **encourages** the WCC to explore ways in which churches and the ecumenical movement may make a meaningful contribution in this regard.

Calls for the lifting of sanctions and/or addressing the negative impacts of such sanctions on ordinary people in countries such as Syria, Cuba, Venezuela and Zimbabwe, and encourages further study of the effectiveness of international sanctions against perpetrators of violence and oppression, and the negative impacts of insufficiently targeted sanctions on ordinary people, and on humanitarian response, social service, and peacebuilding - especially by churches and related organizations - in affected countries.

Urges the WCC to engage with ACT Alliance and other international actors to support efforts towards a new international harm reduction policy to replace the “war against drugs” military paradigm.

Suggests that the WCC cooperate with ACT Alliance and other ecumenical partners, as well as UN and civil society partners, to strengthen the capacity of churches around the world for psycho-social counselling and support, especially in conflict-affected settings.

Prays that the love of Christ will move this suffering and divided world to reconciliation and to unity, and that all perpetrators of violence and division will repent of their sins and act to restore justice and peace.

Annex - Background information (for information)

The following information has informed the actions in this policy.

Climate crisis and competition for essential resources for life

In humanity's relations with the earth, a crisis has become a global emergency, due to our generation's failure to recognize - let alone effectively address - the unprecedented threat of climate change, and to take the actions at

governmental and societal level that are needed to avert it. The consequence of armed conflict, especially the current war in Ukraine, is driving the world even more rapidly towards the precipice of climate catastrophe, while undermining prospects for effective intergovernmental cooperation at the global level to change this suicidal course.

Concurrently, increasing levels of deforestation are weakening the Earth's own resilience and accelerating the disastrous rate of biodiversity loss, while environmental contamination by microplastics and chemical pollutants raises further concerns for human and environmental wellbeing. A deteriorating environment, and the diminution of Earth's capacity to sustain human communities, incidentally, increases the risks of armed conflict due to increasing competition for water, food, land, and other essential resources for life.

Economic injustice and inequality in the marketplace

Economic injustice, inequality and the gulf between the richest few and the overwhelming majority of others has become vastly greater, especially during the Covid-19 pandemic and more recently the war in Ukraine that have caused so much suffering for so many but during which the privileged few have earned exceptional windfall gains.

The [World Inequality Report 2022](#) demonstrates that the richest 10% of the global population currently takes 52% of global income, whereas the poorest half of the population earns 8.5% of it, and that whilst the poorest half of the global population barely owns any wealth at all - possessing just 2% of the total - the richest 10% of the global population own 76% of all wealth. Income and wealth inequalities have been on the rise nearly everywhere since the 1980s, have escalated significantly in more recent years, and currently stand close to early 20th century levels, at the peak of Western imperialism.

Such inequality is not inevitable, but a political and (im)moral choice, with grave consequences for social stability, peace and justice. Although agreement was reached in 2021 on a global minimum corporate tax rate of 15%, corporations and the wealthiest individuals routinely continue to avoid the redistributive mechanism of taxation through the widespread use of tax havens and other techniques. The appeal for tax justice goes largely unheard and unmet.

Interstate conflicts and re-emergence of war

Among the nations, conflict and armed violence has continued to be a tragically prominent reality.

The European region and historical moment in which this Assembly convenes is particularly marked by the re-emergence of inter-state conflict on the continent of Europe due to Russia's invasion of Ukraine. Entailing terrible suffering for the Ukrainian people as well as for many more around the world, the war in Ukraine is massively compounding a global food and energy crisis, contributing to economic, social, and political instability in many places far beyond the borders of Europe, and provoking a renewed military confrontation between Russia and the West, raising again the spectre of nuclear war.

After a brief window of opportunity for peace was squandered, the Korean Peninsula - where the 10th Assembly met - has again slipped into renewed confrontation and escalating conflict risk.

Though the war in Syria has abated, peace, justice, and stability remain distant prospects for the Syrian people. The so-called 'Islamic State' - an empire of terrorist brutality - has risen and fallen, but with lingering consequences for human security and social cohesion in Syria, Iraq, the Middle East region, and the wider world. In Israel and Palestine, periodic outbursts of bloody violence - especially affecting the people of Gaza, as well as many others in the region - have occurred throughout this period, during which the military occupation of the Palestinian territories has continued and the longstanding demands for justice and equal human rights remained unfulfilled.

In South Sudan and Colombia, solemn commitments to peace have languished for lack of implementation.

The people of other priority countries for the Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace, such as Nigeria and the Democratic Republic of the Congo, have continued to be afflicted by persistent conflict, violence, and instability.

Moreover, new conflicts have exploded or escalated, in the anglophone region of Cameroon, in Yemen, and in Ethiopia - where fierce fighting has recently resumed between Ethiopian federal forces and the Tigray People's Liberation Front after a five-month humanitarian truce. And in Myanmar, the democratically-elected government was displaced by a military coup in February 2021, following which the people of the country have been subjected to increasing oppression, violence and displacement.

The situation in Kosovo and Metohija warrants closer attention by the WCC and the international community, and increased comprehensive protection of the Serbian Orthodox Church community in Kosovo and Metohija.

The spectre of nuclear war

Since the World Council of Churches' First Assembly in 1948 in Amsterdam – where the WCC described nuclear weapons as a “sin against God” and “a crime against humanity” – the WCC has consistently and continuously called for a world free from nuclear weapons. The victims of the terrible effects of the first and so far, only use of nuclear weapons in conflict – in Hiroshima and Nagasaki in 1945 – demand their elimination. We know that any use of nuclear weapons today would result in catastrophic humanitarian consequences to which no country would have adequate capacity to respond, and that the consequences could not be constrained by national borders and would linger for thousands of years. We acknowledge and lament that, even if never again used in war, the effects of historic nuclear testing programmes on the health and environments of thousands, possibly millions, of people and their descendants in the Pacific region, Australia, the US, Algeria, Kazakhstan and elsewhere are grave and ongoing.

Supported by the efforts of the WCC and its ecumenical, interfaith and civil society partners in the [International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons](#) (ICAN), the [Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons](#) (TPNW) was adopted by the United Nations in 2017, and entered into force in January 2021. States ratifying the TPNW accept that they are prohibited from developing, testing, producing, manufacturing, transferring, possessing, stockpiling, using or threatening to use nuclear weapons, or allowing nuclear weapons to be stationed on their territory. The TPNW has already created a new normative standard in international law that is on the way to delegitimizing the very existence of nuclear weapons, as well as introducing positive obligations for victim assistance and environmental remediation.

However, nuclear-armed states continue to maintain, develop, and increase their nuclear arsenals, other states still aspire to such weapons as the ultimate form of leverage in international relations, and ‘nuclear umbrella’ states continue to look to nuclear-armed allies as a key pillar of their security. But a security guarantee that threatens global devastation is illusory, illegitimate, and morally indefensible. Far from preserving peace and security, the mere possession of nuclear weapons serves to coerce and intimidate, to inflame tensions, and to facilitate aggression. The very existence of these most indiscriminately

destructive weapons that human beings have ever created violates the fundamental tenets of our faith. They are not safe in any human hands, and they must be eliminated.

Proliferation of weapons

In addition to nuclear weapons, the proliferation of other weapons in the context of conflict and escalating confrontation - including the uncontrolled spread of small arms and light weapons in communities - presents grave challenges for peace and human security.

Meanwhile, the development of new types of weapons and new theatres of conflict – such as autonomous weapons systems ([‘Killer Robots’](#)), drones and cyber-warfare – threaten a new and perilous global arms race.

Increased military spending inevitably comes at the cost of essential investment in peacebuilding, the elimination of extreme poverty, climate action, a just transition to renewable energy, and other investments in sustainable development and economic justice that are necessary for true human security and global stability. The direction of even more financial resources away from these purposes and towards the means of making war is self-defeating and unacceptable.

Polarization and division

Polarization, division, and exclusion is the antithesis of the purpose of our movement. Accordingly, as a worldwide ecumenical fellowship, we must actively and assertively resist all such forces of division and proclaim instead the reconciliation and unity to which the love of Christ calls us. In this historical moment and context, it is an urgent imperative of our Christian faith and witness in the world.

In 1948, the Amsterdam Assembly held that “[w]ar is contrary to the will of God”. In 1975, the Nairobi Assembly called on churches to “emphasize their readiness to live without the protection of armaments and take a significant initiative in pressing for effective disarmament.” In 1983, the Vancouver Assembly considered that the time had come when “the churches must declare that the production and deployment as well as the use of nuclear weapons are a crime against humanity.” In 2006, the Port Alegre Assembly affirmed the responsibility to protect, with the prevention of assaults on individuals and communities its primary focus and recognizing that any resort to armed force represents a failure

of that responsibility. In 2013, the Busan Assembly charted the “Way of Just Peace” and asserted that “[w]e must join other communities of faith and people of good will to... delegitimize the institution of war.” The direction of our collective ecumenical journey is abundantly clear, and it stands in stark and opposition to the direction of the world today.

Grave concerns are being raised in the ecumenical fellowship about the instrumentalization of religious language, authority and leadership to justify, support, or “bless” armed aggression, in sharp contrast to the Christian calling to be peacemakers and contradictory to core ecumenical principles. Consequently, a fresh and critical analysis – and deep and sustained dialogue - on these issues and on the Christian faith in its relation to politics, the nation and nationalism is urgently called for.

Reform of international governance for peace and security

The current constellation of conflicts and converging threats to peace and human security also demands serious re-examination of intergovernmental structures, policy and practice for the promotion of peace and prevention of war - including long-overdue reform of the UN Security Council.

The impotence of the post-World War II international security architecture when one of the five permanent members (P5) of the UN Security Council is the perpetrator of armed aggression has once again been thrown into sharp relief by the Ukraine conflict and inspired fresh calls for reform. Many previous attempts to reform the UN Security Council for greater inclusion and better effectiveness - and to prevent misuse of the veto power - have been signally unsuccessful. However, the recent initiative led by Liechtenstein requiring a UN General Assembly debate whenever a veto is cast in the Security Council represents a small sign of hope and applies a certain measure of accountability to veto-holding P5 members of the Security Council. While this initiative still falls short of the needed reform, this 11th Assembly of the WCC acknowledges it as a step in the right direction, towards a greater measure of justice in the UN’s pre-eminent forum at a time when effective international governance for peace and security is most sorely needed and most seriously threatened.

Respect for and accountability to international humanitarian and human rights law is an essential foundation for international peace and justice. And yet states increasingly flout and undermine it or invoke it only in pursuit of their own perceived interests. States must re-commit to the universal and impartial

application of these obligations, and the mechanisms of legal accountability to these principles must be strengthened.

Violations of international humanitarian and human rights law

In addition to the tragically frequent attacks on civilians and civilian infrastructure (including hospitals and schools) in conflicts during these years - affecting especially vulnerable populations, food or access to food is increasingly being used as a weapon of war. Moreover, anti-personnel landmines - which have continued to be deployed despite the Landmine Ban Treaty of 1997 - not only kill and maim indiscriminately and often long after conflict has ended, but also render productive agricultural land unusable and impede access to water sources in many affected rural locations. Cluster munitions - another indiscriminate weapons system banned by most countries - have also repeatedly been used in recent conflicts, with innocent children often the victims.

Violence against children

The elimination of violence against children, among the most vulnerable members of society and our hope for the future of our communities, has become an important priority for the WCC following the mandate given by the Busan Assembly. In addition to violence suffered by children in the context of conflict, children face the threat of violence in their communities and even in their homes, with lockdowns during the Covid-19 pandemic having increased the salience of this threat and the incidence of such violence at home. The [Churches' Commitments to Children](#) have provided an important framework for ecumenical engagement in the elimination of violence against children, including through the role of churches in ensuring child-safe church environments as well as addressing violence against children in their societies and homes.

The role of women and youth in peace-making

Together with children, women are often the victims of armed conflicts instigated and perpetrated by men. Whether as victims of indiscriminate attacks, or targeted for sexual violence, or killed or maimed by the lingering detritus of conflict, women carry the burden of men's wars. Gender injustice continues to be widely prevalent, undermining the prospects of women and girls throughout the world. Despite important progress in some areas, women's human rights have been rolled back in others. Moreover, lockdowns in many countries during the Covid-19 pandemic exposed women and girls to heightened risks of domestic violence, and sexual and gender-based violence has continued to be an

abhorrent reality in many societies and many contexts, including through the recurrent use of rape as a weapon of war.

But - as Pilgrim Team Visits undertaken in the context of the Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace have demonstrated - women have a powerful but under-recognized and under-supported agency as peacemakers. Likewise young people, who otherwise must fight and suffer the most direct impacts of the wars launched by their elders, should be given a much more significant space in the fields of peace-making and peacebuilding.

Governmental and intergovernmental actors, as well as churches and related organizations, must do more to support the role of women and young people as agents of peace. The international system has provided mechanisms by which to support this goal, including UN Resolution 1325 and the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Sanctions

In the experience of the WCC, sanctions and other coercive economic measures rarely achieve their stated purposes, and invariably do significant harm to the civilian population, especially women, children, and other vulnerable groups. Syria is an important case in point. International and unilateral sanctions are contributing to worsening the humanitarian situation, harming a civilian population already made vulnerable by war. Moreover, sanctions are damaging the historical multicultural and multireligious fabric of the Syrian society, forcing Christians and other indigenous groups to flee the country.

Together with Caritas Internationalis and World Evangelical Alliance, and in cooperation with ACT Alliance, WCC has commissioned a research project on the negative impacts of sanctions on humanitarian response, social service and peace-building in a number of affected countries. The results of this research project are awaited.

Trauma healing

The experience of victims of war and violence is often carried into the future through psychological trauma that may persist long after any physical wounds have healed. That trauma, especially if widespread in a conflict-affected society, may reduce resilience and predispose towards repeated cycles of violence. Intergenerational effects of trauma perpetuate the effects of war and violence. This vicious cycle must be broken by the healing of memories through psycho-

social counselling and support, which churches have a powerful potential to facilitate.