

## The final WCC PWE Document:

### An Economy of Life – Peace and Justice for All. A Call to Action

Speaking notes

**Three members of CEC's Task Force on Globalization have also been members of the WCC PWE Reference Group (Rob van Drimmelen, Peter Pavlovic and Raag Rolfsen). The present paper presents a European perspective on the PWE process and the final document:**

**Background:** In 2006, the AGAPE document was presented to delegates at the general Assembly of the World Council of churches in Porto Alegre. The document was the end result of a process that was initiated in Harare in 1998, and that was leading up to the General Assembly in Porto Alegre. The process should work on issues related to the Church's role in an era of economic globalization. When the AGAPE-document was presented to the general Assembly in Brazil, it was generally well received by most representatives of the churches in the South, as well as by some of the more progressive of the delegates from the Northern churches, such as for example the Canadian. From some of the European Churches and representatives, the document was met with strong criticism.

The criticism was two-sided. One side of the disapproval accused the process of having been characterized more by selection than by representation. The contributors seemed more like hand-picked representatives of an already given view than representatives of the WCC member churches. Secondly, it was argued that the document presented a one-sided analysis, based on the most critical globalization ideology that exists in milieus relating to the World Social Forum. This, it was pointed out, was reflected in the document through a very contrasting presentation: North-South, the system or Empire-victims, globalization-the original and pure state = God's will etc. A deep disagreement came to the sight, and the General Assembly therefore decided that the time leading up to the next General Assembly should be used for a more inclusive and participatory process.

**Process – Poverty, Wealth and Ecology (PWE):** The PWE was planned and implemented as a process of consultations on every continent in the five years between the two general assemblies, and with a final global consultation in the last year before the next general Assembly (Africa [Dar es Salaam] 2007, Latin America and the Caribbean [Guatemala City] 2008, Asia and the Pacific [Chiang Mai], Europe [Budapest] 2010, North America [Calgary] 2011 and finally in Indonesia [Bogor] 2012). The process was as a starting point given the task of exploring *the mutual correlation* between poverty, wealth and ecology. Implicit in this was a point of view that the accumulation of wealth in the hands of a few, and the system that maintained this unjust distribution, could not be viewed independently of poverty and the threats to ecology and climate which we see today. Herein lay a critique both of the neoliberal ideology, which in its purest form argues that growth among the richest also helps those with least resources so that they will be lifted out of poverty, and of the point that growth in knowledge and technology will be sufficient to remedy the damage that is done to the ecological systems.

One of the demands of the process, was that it should be based on objective research and not only on ideology. Looking in retrospect, and with a certain exception for the Budapest-consultation, it is necessary to point out that the process cannot be considered as objective and research-based. Both among participants at the consultations, keynote speakers, and research institutes that were invited to draft the reports from every continent, there was a distinct overrepresentation from the

globalization-critical milieus. Among the European representatives in both the Reference Group and at the various consultations, there was a growing concern. This was also pointed out in several rounds, and the WCC leadership of the process should be given credit for taking this into account in the final phase of the process. The most recent consultation was global and inclusive in a very ambitious way, and it must be described as impressive that one in the end was able to arrive at a statement that everyone could accept. Openness towards the European concerns also led to the fact that both the delegate from KEK, Peter Pavlovic and myself was given space in the group that was supposed to draft and finally to conclude the final statement.

**The statement – An Economy of Life – Peace and Justice for All:** The final statement from PWE-process is characterized by four main concerns. As already indicated, it was a very ambitious goal, and somehow a success, to include all of these concerns. At the same time it's possible to claim that this inclusion is the main weakness of the final document. This is at least the point of view of those who for taking out the "politically correct" of the statement (i.e. that which relates to indigenous theology, feminist theology, the interreligious dimension, the dimension of peace, etc.), in favor of a clean cut and acute critique of the link between climate crisis, economic crisis, consumption patterns and injustice.

- 1. The acute situation:** From the European, and especially from some of the German representatives, the necessity of immediate action in the face of the urgency of today's mutually reinforcing crises was underlined. This was attempted partly through making the term "climate justice" the main concept of the statement. The final document chose to omit the term but to include subject matter. In this approach, we have no time to waste before we lose control of the self-reinforcing effect of today's inter-related systems. This concern is reflected in the paragraphs 1 and under the heading "Intertwined and Urgent Crisis"-section 9-16 – and partly in section 21.
- 2. Theological Foundation:** There was a wide-spread consensus during the last consultation in Bogor that the theological section should be strengthened and placed early in the document. This is to be found primarily in the sections 2 to 8, "Theological and Spiritual Affirmations of Life", but also reflected in the paragraphs under the heading "The Well-springs of Justice" - section 17-20. Both the explicitly theological section and the other sections are to a small degree based on traditional Christian Dogmatics. They rather choose to refer directly to biblical prophecy, to Jesus ' call to conversion at the beginning of his Ministry, and to the upside down power conditions in the Kingdom of God as revealed in the Gospels and in Paul. This reference to Scripture is complemented by references to feminist theology and indigenous philosophy/theology, here with the weight of man's fundamental dependence on the Earth. The biggest controversy in the work of the document occurred around the wording "human accountability *to* all of God's creation" and not "*for* all creation," in which the document's wording in paragraph 22 seems to make the creation itself divine.
- 3. Anti-neoliberalism:** This perspective, which was dominant in the AGAPE process and AGAPE document, has also been strongly present in the process that has led up to this document. The direct criticisms are integrated into the sections that describe the acute crisis (see above, point 1), particularly in sections 13-16. It is also important to point out that the word "transformation" in this document means the transition from an explicitly neoliberal market capitalism to a new system, that is, to a new global economic and financial architecture (see for example sections 7, 21 and 22). The word "transformation" must be understood as a

compromise that has been achieved through the PWE-process. It places itself in the middle between "revolution" and "reform". This compromise contributed to the fact that the European representatives could defend the document.

**4. The Call:** The document ends with a call to action. This appears already in the first paragraph and in the last 6 paragraphs 21-25 "Commitments and Call". This is in part a general call, addressing the urgent global situation (sections 1, 21 and 22), and a more specific call to the WCC General Assembly to get to grips with the emergency situation through its program of action for the next period (paragraphs 23-26). The focus of action is central here. Unlike the two previous processes with a more thematic focus on globalization, the final document of the PWE-process urges the WCC to take concrete steps regarding the churches ' own transformation in order to contribute to a new global and more just and peaceful economic and financial architecture.

**Conclusion:** There are still reasons to ask some skeptical questions about both the WCC document and the process that led up to it. This applies to both process and content, where traces from the previous process of selection and one-sidedness can be found. I would however urge the church bodies which are going to respond to the document on the road to the WCC General Assembly to remain positive. This is firstly due to the factual existence of different views and ideologies in the worldwide Church that, therefore, is quite naturally reflected in the final document. The second point that speaks for the proposal that the document should be supported is that the final global consultation was very inclusive and that it must be regarded as a tiring but good process where one could achieve consensus. The last point that can be stressed is that the European representatives played an important role in the final phase.

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