

Preface

The European Churches' Joint Efforts on Human Rights

The Conference of European Churches (CEC) has a long-standing record of promoting human rights. The beginnings date back to mainly two developments in the mid-70's of the last century. One development was the establishment of the Conference for Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE, later: OSCE: Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe) in Helsinki in 1975. The CSCE, next to the United Nations, became a political *vis-à-vis* for CEC as an explicitly pan-European fellowship of churches which had the promotion of peace and reconciliation as one of its "*raison d'être*" since its beginnings in 1958. As in the CSCE (or "Helsinki Process") the implementation of human rights was seen by the churches as an indispensable precondition for peace and reconciliation beyond the East-West divide of the continent and a means to promote Christian values in society.

The other development in the mid-70's was the broader ecumenical debate on human rights triggered by the consultation of the World Council of Churches (WCC) in St. Pölten (Austria, 1974) and the then following WCC Assembly in Nairobi in 1975. Following the Nairobi Assembly, the WCC Central Committee asked CEC, the Council of Churches of Christ in the USA and the Canadian Council of Churches to become the parent bodies of what became known as the "Churches Human Rights Programme of the Implementation of the Helsinki Final Act". Background to this development was the then ecumenical debate on how to do justice and how to resource two major priorities on the global ecumenical agenda: the Cold War and the East-West confrontation on the one side and North-South relations and global justice on the other. As a result of the WCC recommendation, a small secretariat for the Churches Human Rights' Programme was established in Geneva in 1980, which later became the desk for "Peace, Justice and Human Rights" of CEC.

This first period was characterised by a growing awareness among European churches with regard to human rights. Churches made the CSCE and UN commitments known in their respective states and got especially engaged on issues and cases related to freedom of religion or belief. However, later accounts of the Churches Human Rights Programme also show that common human rights' work across the Iron Curtain remained highly politicised and was caught in the parameters set by the on-going Cold War.¹

¹ Cf. e.g. Theo Tschuy, *An Ecumenical Experiment in Human Rights*, ed. by The Churches' Human Rights Programme for the Implementation of the Helsinki Final Act, Geneva 1985; Katharina Kunter, *Die Kirchen im KSZE Prozeß 1968-1978*, Stuttgart, Berlin, Köln 2000; Hugh McLeod & Risto Saarinen, *North European Churches from the Cold War to Globalisation*, in: Hugh McLeod, Risto Saarinen, Aila Lauha, *North European Churches. From the Cold War to Globalisation*, Jyväskylä 2006.

A new window of opportunities, which might be described as a second phase in the churches' efforts on human rights, opened at the beginning of 1986 with the policy of *glasnost* and *perestroika* in the former Soviet Union and later on with the ensuing revolutionary changes in 1989. When the Heads of State and Government of all European states came together in 1990, they adopted the "Charter of Paris for a New Europe", committing themselves to a new Europe based on democracy, human rights and the rule of law.² The time for making substantial progress in implementing existing human rights standards seemed to have come.

This vision was also shared by the churches and even expressed some months earlier at the European Ecumenical Assembly in Basel (May 1989), just prior to the fall of the Berlin Wall. The Final Document of the Assembly listed all major human rights instruments and called for "the full implementation of the international human rights agreements on civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights, and of the instruments for their concrete application" in order to "overcome situations of injustice, dealing with discrimination, racism, sexism, torture, disappearance and killing of people and other violations of human rights, including the right of peoples and nations of self-determination".³

In the spirit of the Basel European Ecumenical Assembly, the churches enlarged the scope of their human rights agenda to cover a broader spectrum of rights, especially minority rights. CEC began to support its Member Churches in addressing human rights violations and, together with the Middle East Council of Churches, organised a first human rights' training course.⁴ The Churches Human Rights' Programme published a first "Manual for Practitioners".⁵

It is also during that period that other political institutions got into the focus of European churches' advocacy work on human rights. CEC began to cooperate closer with the European Ecumenical Commission for Church and Society (EECCS - 1999), which had been liaising for many years to the Council of Europe and the European Communities on behalf of European churches, also on issues related to human rights. Since then, CEC and EECCS integrated and established the Church and Society Commission of CEC. As a result of the integration, the Church and Society Commission is now relating to all four political organisations with regard to

² Charter of Paris for a New Europe. Meeting of the Heads of State and Government of the participating States of the Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe, Paris 1990.

³ Final Document of the European Ecumenical Assembly "Peace with Justice for the whole Creation", § 84c; in: Peace with Justice. The official documentation of the European Ecumenical Assembly, Basel, Switzerland, 15-21 May 1989, Geneva 1989.

⁴ Cf. International Human Rights Training Seminar, 15-28 September 1983, Limassol, Cyprus, ed. by the Conference of European Churches and the Middle East Council of Churches, Geneva, Beirut 1994. Further Human Rights Training Courses were organised by CEC, together with the Lutheran World Federation in Sibiu (1999) and Bratislava (2004).

⁵ Cf. Protecting Human Rights. A Manual for Practitioners, ed by Eric Weingärtner for the Churches' Human Rights Programme in the CSCE, Geneva 1994.

human rights: the United Nations, the OSCE, the Council of Europe and the European Union.

The theological basis for the churches' joint human rights work in this second period is quite clearly expressed in the introduction to the report on the first training course in 1993: "This (the churches') mandate is rooted in the conviction that God created the human being in His own image, and that, through the self-sacrificing and reconciling love of Jesus Christ, Christians are called – in addition to providing help to those in need – to be in solidarity with those who are marginalised, silenced or oppressed, regardless of their religion, race and gender. ... Our aim, therefore, is to enable and promote the churches' common response to justice and peace which is not based on any ideology or partisan politics but stems from Jesus Christ's love for humanity."⁶

Why a new Human Rights Manual for Churches now? – New Challenges!

New challenges have arisen since the promising re-start in 1989. Looking back, it might seem that the years after the revolutionary changes in Eastern Europe have been little more than a "window" of opportunity in terms of a more forceful implementation of human rights. Several developments have contributed to this "set-back" and have also led to substantial discussions about the concept of human rights.

The end of the East-West confrontation, which determined so many years of the era after WWII, led to a great acceleration of the globalisation process. New freedoms and new means of communication as well as possibilities for easier travel brought people closer together globally. On the downside of these developments, however, people discovered that more and more decisions were taken on an international and global level, far away from them, and by international bodies and companies often without or with hardly any democratic legitimisation. When churches gathered in 1998 under the auspices of the World Council of Churches in order to review new challenges in the field of human rights, they stated that "globalisation increasingly undermines the political participation of large sectors of society in the democratic process and their ability to influence state policy in the wider public interest".⁷

The process of globalisation affecting all sectors of society also made people ask for their own identity and tradition in the context of a globalised world. At best this is a question with the intention to grow one's own identity and to live it in a broader context, but this can also turn into

⁶ Cf. footnote 4; page 5.

⁷ A Statement by the International Ecumenical Consultation, Morges, Switzerland, 23-27 June 1998, in: Human Rights and the Churches. New Challenges, ed. Commission of the Churches on International Affairs 1998/1, World Council of Churches, Geneva 1998, page 12.

an attitude of defensiveness and segregation. In any case, in the field of human rights, despite the “margin of appreciation” emphasized in international jurisdiction, a discussion on the relation between national tradition(s) and national legislation and on the universality of human rights’ standards re-emerged. Human rights were often referred to as a “Western” concept and as a consequence, in various contexts, the universality and indivisibility of all human rights is being challenged, when certain rights are declared alien to and inconsistent with a nation’s own tradition and legal system and, therefore, not applicable. The CSCE/OSCE principles as well the Basel European Ecumenical Assembly refer to both the implementation of human rights and the right to self-determination of peoples, states and nations. The relationship between both is again under discussion.

The indivisibility of all human rights is also challenged from another angle: The WCC Global Review on Human Rights in 1998 observed an “ideological division between civil and political rights on the one hand, and social, economic and cultural rights on the other, the latter having been largely ignored in the official international human rights implementation process of the United Nations until recently”.⁸ The globalisation process, characterised in the WCC statement as a “shift towards greater concentration of power”, which “intensified injustice, exploitation and inequalities in most parts of the world” made the division and its disastrous consequences for large parts of the world’s population even more visible and called for a different approach.

And last but not least, the perhaps biggest threat to the international commitment to human rights was posed by the terrorist attacks in New York, Washington, London, Madrid and elsewhere in the world and in Europe. The terrorist attacks, inhumane acts of violence, are an attack on human rights and the dignity of human beings on an unprecedented scale. But in response to them several, also European, governments tightened their legal framework and considered suspending certain human rights and/or certain (international) human rights instruments. The world and Europe found itself in a new debate on the relationship between human rights and (national) security – a debate which also got its momentum from double standards being applied by some states.

All these challenges did not leave the churches in Europe unaffected. On the one hand, churches given their own commitment and in view of the new challenges, got even stronger engaged in the promotion of human rights. Some churches, however, also saw the need to reflect again on their approach to human rights, most significantly visible in the dialogue between the Russian Orthodox Church and the Community of Protestant Churches in Europe.⁹ And with all of the above-mentioned new challenges

⁸ Ibid, page 9.

⁹ Cf. The Russian Orthodox Church’s Basic teaching on Human Dignity, Freedom and Rights (2008): <http://www.mospat.ru/en/documents/dignity-freedom-rights> and Human Rights and Morality, published by the

in mind, among and within churches, the ongoing dialogue first and foremost needs to be a theological dialogue, which reflects and at times challenges the churches' human rights practice.

The re-emerging discussions in the field of human rights within and among European churches have made substantial progress already¹⁰, but they are far from having come to an end. This reflects the fact that human rights are not a static concept – human rights need to be developed, re-owned and applied. Facing the above-mentioned challenges of today, it is important, however, that the churches individually and collectively stay committed to the implementation of human rights. This commitment is clearly expressed in the Charta Oecumenica (adopted and signed in 2001), where the churches together declare: “On the basis of our Christian faith, we work towards a humane, socially conscious Europe, in which human rights and the basic values of peace, justice, participation and solidarity prevail.”¹¹ Consequently, many of the guidelines in the Charta Oecumenica for a growing cooperation among the churches in Europe draw on recognised human rights standards.

How to use this Manual

The literature on human rights fills libraries. And there are also some Human Rights Manuals published by other organisations.¹² Among the many valuable resources, this Manual has two specificities: it addresses and is written specifically for churches which want to strengthen their commitment to involve more people in the active promotion of human rights through training. Its second specificity is that it draws on the wealth of experience and knowledge accumulated by churches of different confessions and contexts from all over Europe in order to make it available as a source of inspiration for others.

Community of Protestant Churches in Europe, Vienna 2009:

http://www.leuenberg.net/sites/default/files/Human_rights_and_morality%20%28final%29.pdf.

The Church and Society Commission of CEC was involved with the Russian Orthodox Church as well as with CPCE prior to issuing their documents. In March 2007, theologians and legal experts of the Church and Society Commission met in Moscow with the Drafting Committee of the Russian Orthodox Church. A joint final statement reads: “The two delegations agreed that the result of the present debate on human rights within the Russian Orthodox Church and among European churches will be to strengthen the churches' commitment to human rights as laid down, for instance, in the United Nations' Bill of Human Rights, the European Convention on Human Rights and the Council of Europe's Social Charter as well as in documents of the Follow-Up Conferences of the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe.”

¹⁰ Cf. e.g. the contributions and results of the various conferences in recent years as documented in the human rights and religious freedom section of the Church and Society Commission website:

<http://csc.ceceurope.org/issues/human-rights>.

¹¹ Charta Oecumenica. Guidelines for the Growing Cooperation among Churches in Europe, ed. by the Conference of European Churches and the Council of European Bishops Conferences, Geneva/St Gallen 2001, § III.7.

¹² Cf. e.g. Handbook for Helsinki Committees. A Guide in Monitoring and Promoting Human Rights and NGO Management, published by the International Helsinki Federation for Human Rights, Vienna 1995; Training Manual on Human Rights Monitoring, published by the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, New York/Geneva 2001; Compass. A manual on human rights education with young people, published by the Council of Europe, Strasbourg, 3rd edition 2007.

The Manual is divided into two main chapters. The first chapter entitled "Making the World a Better Place – The Churches' Approach to Human Rights" gathers articles from experts addressing various aspects of the present human rights discourse from a faith-based perspective. The authors do not necessarily express the views of the Conference of European Churches as a whole. The variety of backgrounds from within the CEC constituency reflected by the authors is meant to serve as a source of inspiration for all those who want to get involved as well as for the further debate among European churches. The approach to address the issues in distinct articles from different authors invites readers to either read them all or to select aspects which interest them most.

A second chapter offers "Material for Training, Workshops and Seminars". In that chapter, the reader will find a few general articles which will help planning workshops or seminars: on developing a human rights concept, on international human rights' instruments and mechanisms as well as a checklist for preparing training events. In addition, that chapter contains background articles on five paradigmatic human rights' topics presently on the churches' agenda. These topics are: religious freedom, anti-discrimination, migration, social rights, and children's rights. Experts are presenting introductions and overviews on the present debate with regard to those topics, which help trainers to use the didactical material included on the CD accompanying the printed material. The didactical material on the accompanying CD consists of commented PowerPoint Presentations for use in training sessions. As indicated at the beginning of each presentation, the material needs to be adjusted according to the aims, the target group and the context in which the training is taking place. For this purpose, the checklist for organising trainings and the additional material referred to in the commentaries of the PowerPoint Presentations will be of help.

The list of further resources (books and websites) at the end of the printed version of the Manual is deliberately kept short so as not to overwhelm readers and practitioners with material. As there is so much material produced and published on the topic, references in the text will direct readers to other resources which could be of immediate use in the framework of this Manual. A major resource in relation to this Human Rights Manual is the human rights section of CEC's Church and Society Commission website (<http://csc.ceceurope.org/issues/human-rights>), which is regularly updated with regard to human rights developments in the European political institutions, contains a churches' human rights library, public statements of the Conference of European Churches as well as reports and material from consultations and conferences. The electronic version of this Human Rights Manual can also be found there, and we intend to update the electronic version of the Manual as churches are sending in their material and translations.

Where do we go from here?

The Church and Society Commission of the Conference of European Churches will itself offer training courses on the basis of the Manual over the coming years. But we hope that the use of the material will go much beyond that. We would be happy if this Manual could stimulate further discussion, training and commitment to human rights issues in European churches. The material presented in this Manual can freely be used and amended, provided a reference to the source is mentioned. We would also be happy to receive your feedback on how the material was used in training sessions and discussions within your church: which sections you find more useful; what is missing; which further resources would you recommend to add; which further needs you have in your human rights work. If you translate or amend some of the material, we would appreciate to get a copy.

As already stated above, the debate on human rights is going on and as a consequence a lot of material is being produced. The human rights' section of the CEC/CSC website tries to keep churches and others up to date. We also gladly offer this website as a forum for exchanging information and for publishing further human rights-related articles and material produced by churches, which might serve as a source of inspiration for others. In this sense, the website should also serve as a tool for further developing and amending the Human Rights Manual. Your feedback would be most welcome: csc@cec-kek.be.

Words of Thanks

It was a long journey from the first idea for this Human Rights Manual to its development and finalisation in its present form. Many people have been involved who deserve to be acknowledged and thanked, first and foremost the authors of articles and contributors of this handbook. The short references about the various authors at the end of the Manual only give a glimpse of the wealth of expertise and experience gathered among the wide range of contributors.

Special thanks also go to Ms Hermine Masmeyer, who translated the articles, reflections and information into the didactical material offered in the PowerPoint presentations on the CD. The production of the Manual substantially benefitted from her knowledge in developing e-learning material and her long-standing experience in training legal professionals and others on human rights issues. Developing training material specifically aimed at the churches certainly posed an extra challenge to her.

The Manual developed under the supervision and with the constant advice of the CSC Human Rights Working Groups and the Human Rights Secretaries of the Church and Society Commission of CEC. It is the Human Rights Secretaries and the Working Groups which have developed the concept of this Manual, identified and contacted experts and reviewed incoming articles. Without their expertise and persistence, producing such a Manual would have proved impossible. Many of them also contributed as authors.

Before its publication, several sections of this Manual were already tested with various target audiences. Our thanks go to all those who offered their valuable comments, which also contributed to developing the Manual in its present stage. And last but not least, we wish to thank the CEC Member Churches which contributed by making their resources available on the CEC/CSC website and supported the project through their financial contributions. The Manual is now given back into their hands in the hope that it will help strengthening the commitment of churches in the area of human rights, individually and collectively.

Rev Rüdiger Noll
CSC Director

Mag Elizabeta Kitanovic
Human Rights Secretary