



Internationale ökumenische Friedenskonvokation

Kingston | Jamaica | 2011

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Ecumenical Agenda

The Council of Christian Churches in Germany (ACK) and the Open Forum on the Decade to Overcome Violence held a consultation from 8-10 February 2010 in the Cardinal Döpfner Conference Centre in Freising, near Munich, Germany, on the topic

“Glory to God and peace on Earth” Challenges by the International Ecumenical Peace Convocation (IEPC)

At its 9th assembly in Porto Alegre in 2006, the World Council of Churches (WCC) decided to hold an International Ecumenical Peace Convocation to conclude the Decade to Overcome Violence (2001–2010). It will take place from 18-24 May 2011 in Kingston, Jamaica, on the theme “Glory to God and Peace on Earth” (Luke 2:14). At the Freising consultation, ninety multipliers from churches, networks, initiatives and groups gathered to explore the topic of just peace in the context of the conciliar process for Justice, Peace and the Integrity of Creation. The results of the consultation, which included lectures and working groups, are summed up in this Ecumenical Agenda. They stimulate us to reflect and act in our own ecumenical responsibility, recommending cooperation with sister churches, other religious communities and non-church actors working for just peace. The Ecumenical Agenda is in the tradition of the Freising Agenda on Overcoming Violence for 2005–2010.

I. The mandate of the International Peace Conference and its addressees

According to the WCC Executive Committee (February 2010) the goal of the Peace Convocation planned for May 2011 in Kingston, Jamaica is

“To gather a wide cross-section of the WCC member churches and their partners – individuals, institutions, organizations and networks – to harvest the fruits of the DOV and other peace initiatives in order to:

1. Develop an ecumenical just peace theology that becomes central to the church’s self-understanding and to Christian spirituality and praxis;
2. Explore directions for church and ecumenical work on just peace in preparation for the WCC assembly in 2013;
3. Envision and structure ecumenical unity in today’s context.”

The approximately 1000 participants at the Convocation will write a message to the churches on the four areas of action named by the WCC (peace in the community, peace with the earth, peace in the marketplace, peace among the peoples). A drafting group moderated by Prof. Dr. Konrad Raiser is working on an Ecumenical Declaration on Just Peace for adoption at the WCC’s 10th assembly in Busan, Republic of Korea in 2013. However, with the same intensity, the IEPC also addresses the context in Europe and Germany, which with its churches, networks and groups forms an active part of the worldwide ecumenical movement. The following remarks are intended to give suggestions for organizing the accompaniment and follow-up of the Peace Convocation in Germany, despite the evident existence of differing approaches and lines of argument.

II. “Just peace” as a recurrent theme of the ecumenical movement and the IEFEC

The concept of just peace involves a new paradigm for peace theology and peace ethics. According to the findings of the Freising Consultation in 2010, it responds to the current planetary challenges, which are spirally intensifying, multiplying and interconnecting with each other. Examples are the global threat to the environment caused by the excessive exploitation of resources, and economic and social impoverishment caused by unbridled, exploitative capitalism. People are apt to be discouraged by the current crises. It is all so complex that they are induced to simplify, repress any inclination to repent, and sometimes they embrace fundamentalist, apocalyptic worldviews. Just peace is intended to become a core topic of global Christianity and part of a process of ecumenical learning and communication. In-depth reflection and the practical implementation of insights into the churches’ different societal forms remain mandatory for the ecumenical movement in Germany in the post-DOV period.

III. Theological and conceptual basis

Just peace takes up the concept of shalom as holistic salvation and well-being in the spirit of the First Testament and connects it with our understanding of God the Father, Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit. This Trinitarian understanding leads us to become aware of Creation, open to reconciliation and active participants in God’s kingdom.

The DOV challenged churches “to overcome the spirit, logic and practice of violence; to relinquish any theological justification of violence; and to affirm anew the spirituality of reconciliation and active nonviolence.”¹ Just peace calls us now to a new ecumenical understanding of the nature of the church, in which peace-building moves “from the periphery to the center of the life and witness of the church”. The development of an ecumenical theology of just peace is a fundamental task for church life and action.

Just peace is the alternative to direct, structural and cultural violence. Physical and mental violence against people is directed against human dignity, integrity and likeness to God. It denies the community of humans with God and among each other. It harms or destroys nature, God’s household. It also destroys the illusion of complete security. Striving for security remains limited by human vulnerability.

We see churches challenged to become ‘churches of peace’ in ecumenical fellowship. For us Germans this means:

1. Accepting our history, including the burden arising from it, and confessing our guilt
2. Renouncing any theological justification of violence
3. Witnessing to peace (*martyria*), working for peace (*diakonia*) and celebrating God’s peace (*leiturgia*) in ecumenical fellowship (*koinonia*)
4. Recognizing the theological connection between the peace of God (the kingdom of God) and peace on earth and making it fruitful for life and action in this world
5. Recognizing the full sense of the theological and ethical challenge to love our enemies and learning to live it
6. Seeking dialogue with people of other faith, discovering community and working together for peace on earth (this also applies to conversation with those who profess no faith)

These points clearly show that we are called to focus on God’s peace in a new ecumenical spirit.

IV. Results of the consultation on the four IEFEC themes

Participants concluded the consultation by evaluating the individual results of the eight working groups according to the priority of tasks, topics and structures. The working groups, the lectures and other discussions

during the consultation gave rise to the priorities outlined for the time remaining before the convocation in Kingston, Jamaica and for further work in Germany.

a) Peace in the community

When it comes to taking precautions against violence, a major role is played by education, especially by communicating Christian or religious values, in addition to the influences to which children are exposed in the everyday world of the family, school and the media.

In order to be able to counteract cultures of violence and, in particular, ‘group-related hostility to humans’² in societies like Germany, it is helpful to keep in mind Johan Galtung’s concept of violence: he distinguishes between direct personal violence, indirect structural violence, and cultural forms of violence.

Important areas for further ecumenical projects are:

1. Running programs to reduce and combat the structural causes of child poverty
2. Providing physical and mental protection against domestic and other forms of violence against women, and redefining gender roles
3. Counteracting the criminalizing of migrants by organizing programs for refugee protection, humanitarian protection through granting asylum and residence permits, and combating the causes of forced migration in the countries of origin
4. Calling for an effective national action plan and a better analysis of the motives, extent, phenomena and effects of racism and extreme rightwing violence
5. Counteracting the uncritical exposure to media and media violence (e.g. in films and computer games conveying the ‘myth of redeeming violence’), for instance through promoting alternative media and realistic scenarios for conflict settlement

b) Peace with the Earth

Global climate change “probably represents the most comprehensive existential threat for the present, and to a much greater extent, for coming generations, as well as for non-human nature”.³ Furthermore, it has already made the general public deeply aware of how necessary it is to have peace with the Earth.

1. The call for “climate justice” requires us to respect the limitations of the earth’s system. The sides of the sustainability triangle (sustainable ecology, efficient business activity, just society) are indissolubly connected in terms of cause and effect. This realization calls our western European lifestyle into question. As churches and initiatives, it is our task not just to call for a change of heart but also to change our own habits.
2. As churches and groups in the ecumenical movement we encourage one another to celebrate “Creation time” (1 September to 4 October), i.e. to regard the Earth and all living things as God’s Creation and to take account of its vulnerability.
3. In the worldwide ecumenical community we recognize our mission as confessing the ecological debt of the North and seeking ways of reconciling with the countries of the South and thus seeking God.

c) Peace in the marketplace

Justice, Peace and the Integrity of Creation are interwoven biblical-theological and socio-political elements of the conciliar process. The present capital-driven, unjust economic order rewards greed. It is geared to life-destroying and socially dividing growth. It is diametrically opposed to a humane, environmentally friendly “economy in the service of life”. The ecumenical debate is about whether and, if so, in what way the Southern churches’ plea for alternatives to the global economic order, in the spirit of the *processus confessionis*, is compatible with the Northern churches’ approach, which is more one of modifying and helping to shape the global economic order. The WCC is trying to bring this debate together in the AGAPE Process (Alternative Globalization Addressing People and Earth, 9th WCC assembly in Porto Alegre in 2006). The differences have not yet been resolved - between the

churches of the South and the North, and in Germany between churches, and between churches and ecumenical networks.

1. Churches and Christians are called upon to give expression to prophetic witness, by helping to transform the capitalist economic order into a caring stewardship with just participation in reconciling relations for people and the Earth.
2. Such solidarity-based economics calls for a consultation process in dialogue with representatives of politics, business, academia and society. Equally important are the individual efforts of churches and Christians.
3. An important international project is that of implementing the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights.

d) Peace among the peoples

The recent general conditions of security and peace policy and thereby the understanding of war-like violence and war are something about which politicians, churches and the whole of society are insufficiently aware. These conditions are not sufficiently reflected on e.g. when it comes to analyzing the future of failing or failed states. Military force is justified in the name of freedom and (western) security.

It is thus necessary to recognize:

1. Military intervention and security with military support cannot create political and social peace in the spirit of shalom. In countries with failing states the key to overcoming armed violence is primarily to be found in setting up functional structures of good governance (legal and security systems, schools, hospitals, social system, etc.). The churches and initiatives are called upon to suggest and promote exemplary civil programs.
2. A term in current use in Germany is ‘networked security’: it must be rejected because of its connection with military force. The understanding of security must be geared to individual security (‘human security’).
3. The spirit, logic and practice of military force must be rejected. That would express the paradigm shift towards just peace even given differing interpretations of pacifism.

Just peace: If you want peace, prepare for peace!

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Translated by Elaine Griffiths.

¹ See Goals of the DOV, www.overcomingviolence.org

² Wilhelm Heitmann, an educationist, coined this phrase (“gruppenbezogene Menschenfeindlichkeit”).

³ Climate Change: a Focal Point of Global, Intergenerational and Ecological Justice, para. 1. Published by Secretariat of the German Bishops’ Conference – Commission for Society and Social Affairs/Commission for International Church Affairs, No. 29, Bonn, 2007, http://www.sjweb.info/documents/sjs/docs/dbk_climatechange.pdf