

SECTION 9: SECTION REPORT
WORKING FOR PEACE AND RECONCILIATION

God has reconciled us to himself through Christ, and has enlisted us in this ministry of reconciliation. (2 Cor 5: 19)

*Jesus said, "Peace is my parting gift to you, my own peace, such as the world cannot give."
(John 14: 27)*

The Section on Working for Peace and Reconciliation presents this report, recognising that Reformed Churches have had a history of conflict and splitting but also that they, and particularly the constituent parts of the new World Communion of Reformed Churches, have long worked faithfully in the name of the Prince of Peace in areas of violence and injustice. This report affirms that work and seeks to identify areas in which work inherited from REC and WARC should be continued as well as areas in which new work may be begun.

The root causes of conflict often lie in situations where people, institutions and nations seek nothing but their own power and wealth. The distinctive witness of the WCRC, its member churches and individual members lies in seeking the will of God, through laying aside the desire for personal, institutional and national advancement which distorts relationships between each other and with God.

The Section named a number of situations in which churches encounter struggle, conflict and strife which inevitably impact upon their ability to proclaim the Gospel.

Conflict issues

These include the problems of conflict arising over scarcity of water, land and other natural resources; political instability, oppression and lawlessness in Zimbabwe; attempts to divide populations and countries by creating political boundaries based on religious lines in Nigeria and Kenya; the need for Christian/Muslim Dialogue and greater understanding, respect and co-operation between these great religions, particularly in Israel/Palestine, Egypt, Syria, Lebanon, Iraq, Indonesia and Morocco; the division of the Korean Peninsula; and the ongoing, life-denying menace of empire as expounded in the Accra Confession.

a. In countries such as Nigeria, Malawi, Sudan and Kenya, there are moves to introduce Shari`a Law which will create inequality before the law and disadvantage Christians and other minority religions and perpetuate and deepen religious division. Since there is a strong Christian presence in those countries, the WCRC has particular responsibility to work there towards peace and reconciliation.

Recommendation: that WCRC, working with appropriate member churches and other organisations, seeks to develop a way to accompany the churches through prophetic solidarity, education and advocacy.

b. The long unresolved Israeli-Palestinian conflict brings instability to the whole Middle East and wider region. The situation has worsened since the beginning of the war on Iraq in 2003 and many Christians are moving away from the region. The Section sees an urgent need to strengthening Christian/Muslim dialogue.

Recommendation: that WCRC works with the churches and others to seek appropriate partners for dialogue, recognising that no solution will be found without engaging with Jewish representatives, wherever possible.

Church issues

These included concerns about divisions between churches along racial, political, cultural and socio-economic lines, especially in South Africa and Central and Eastern Europe; the conflict between two churches in Croatia; the issue of lesbian and gay ordination, which is tearing apart member churches in all

regions as debates take place over whether Scripture allows homosexual practices at all, or for gay and lesbian people in leadership; experiences of conflict arising from differing theologies and practices on the ordination of women; and reconciling relationships between the church and Indigenous people. The Section expresses the hope that ordination issues will be taken up by the Theology Network and recommends that it adopt a pastoral approach with an awareness that deeper and deeper hurt will be caused within churches as debate progresses.

Recommendation: affirm the need to continue work in South Africa and Croatia inherited from WARC.

The Section wishes to focus on Church and Indigenous People issues.

It is important for the WCRC and its member churches to be sensitive to the traditions of other cultures by honouring and respecting their dignity as people. In part, this means that there should be flexibility to accommodate different styles of worship as a way of fostering inclusiveness and treating the cultural contribution of Indigenous people as a gift. More widely, the relationship between the Church and Indigenous people has been marred with racism, abuse and paternalism robbing them of their traditional lands, economic resources, cultural and spiritual identities, and social and political systems. In North America, this was done through the co-operation of governments and church missions in running residential schools to which children were forcibly removed from their homes, stripped of their languages and cultures and frequently subjected to racism, physical and sexual abuse.

Recommendations: that the WCRC

1. seek to initiate a process leading toward confession of past wrongs and the development of a genuine regard for Indigenous People as equally God's people;
2. seek humbly to initiate relationships with Indigenous People in order to listen and understand; to honour and respect the cultural differences of all types of worship expression
3. encourage the inclusion of Indigenous voices in the decision making processes of the WCRC and its member churches;
4. promote the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous people be as a resource with member churches and encourage member churches to find ways it can be lived out in the light of the gospel. (www.un.org/esa/socdev/unpfii/en/drip.html)

Human rights

These include concerns about immigration; family and relationship violence; same sex marriage; abortion; human trafficking; inequality in educational opportunities; racism; the abuse of human rights and detention and deportation of innocent citizens, for example in Madagascar, Colombia, the Philippines and Morocco among many others; and the issue of Roma people in Europe.

The Section chose to focus on immigration.

All human history has involved migration and the Biblical narrative reflects this. Movement should be seen as just as 'normal' as settlement. Migration has often been about seeking resources for life or freedom. Seeking to restrict migration can have the effect of denying opportunities for life and liberty. The Section believes that nothing less than a recognition that all human beings are made in the image of God is demanded of us. Such a recognition should lead to an attitude of welcome towards strangers and a willingness to share.

Recommendation: that the WCRC and its member churches continue to be a witness to God's inclusive welcome and to challenge, through statements and action, all instances where people are treated with indignity because of restrictive and brutal immigration policies.

The Section recommends that the UGC affirms, with deep appreciation, the involvement in the past of the constituent parts of the new WCRC in working for reconciliation and peace and in challenging churches to seek meaningful changes in embracing each other in obedience to God's call and prays that this ministry will continue to flourish.