

WCC ninth assembly in Porto Alegre will be “dynamic and spiritual”

Arrangements for the WCC's next assembly were confirmed during the first full meeting of the Assembly Planning Committee, which was hosted by the monastic community of Bose, in northern Italy, in early February 2004.

The WCC's ninth assembly will meet in Porto Alegre, Brazil, 12-24 February 2006, under the theme “God, in Your Grace, Transform the World”. The assembly will be held at the Pontifical Catholic University (Pontificia Universidade Católica), near the centre of Porto Alegre. The city hosted the three previous World Social Forums.

According to Rev. Norman Shanks, the moderator of the Assembly Planning Committee, “The ninth assembly's theme emphasizes our prayerful dependence on God and points us forward hopefully to the fulfilment of God's purpose of fullness of life for all. We are well on our way to creating a dynamic and spiritual context for the assembly, that will both enable delegates to share their own experience and vision of a transformed world, and shape the WCC's future work.” The WCC assembly is invited to Brazil by the National Council of Christian Churches (CONIC). The national organizing committee involves all the main churches in Brazil. The assembly is expected to attract over 3000 people, including 700 delegates, official observers from other churches, and other advisors and visitors from throughout the region. A new assembly website will be launched later in 2004: www.wcc-assembly.info

World Social Forum Mumbai: “People knew the churches were there!”

Photo: Binu Alex



Dalits from the National Conference of Dalit Organizations (NACDOR) at the World Social Forum light candles to shine on a banner demanding dignity

A festive opening worship service, packed seminars, and special colourful t-shirts were some of the visible signs of a strong ecumenical presence at the fourth (16-21 January) World Social Forum in Mumbai, India.

There were more church-related participants at Mumbai than at any of the three previous forums in Porto Alegre. With massive grassroots and community participation, mostly from the Indian sub-continent itself, the 2004 WSF had a distinctly popular flavour as compared to earlier editions.

The ecumenical presence was coordinated by the WCC, the Ecumenical Advocacy Alliance, the Lutheran World Federation, the National Council of Churches in India, the Conference of Churches in Asia, Churches Auxiliary for Social Action, the YWCA of India and the World YWCA, and the Christian Institute for the Study of Religion. The WCC facilitated the participation of over fifty people from around the world.

Of the 24 well-attended ecumenical seminars and workshops at Mumbai, some were joint efforts and several brought in an interfaith per-

spective. A wide range of issues was covered, including ecological/illegitimate debt and trade, spirituality of life and human dignity, and the dignity of children.

So, with an estimated 80,000 people from 2600 organizations and 132 countries, what did Mumbai achieve? It certainly drew out people's perceptions of the impact of neo-liberal economic policies on their daily lives. Yet, as a platform for workable alternatives, the results were mixed.

“The WSF did not really get beyond a critique of neo-liberal globalization to a blueprint of alternatives,” says

WCC programme executive for economic justice Rogate Mshana. “In the ecumenical movement we propose a vision of a new world, where the spirituality of life and human dignity become the guiding norms.”

“The main challenge is how the diverse alternatives proposed in the WSF can be coordinated into a global agenda,” Mshana says. These questions will be dealt with at the WSF's international council meeting, planned for 5-7 April in Italy; as a member of a thematic commission, the WCC will attend that meeting.

Participation in the World Social Forum is one aspect of the WCC's commitment to economic justice. A series of encounters with the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) that began in February 2002 is planned to culminate this year. And the WCC coordinated ecumenical participation in several major UN conferences related to the economy, including a UN Financing for Development (FFD) summit in Mexico in March 2002, and a World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD) in South Africa in August-September 2002.

See the WCC website: <http://www.wcc-coe.org/wcc/what/jpc/wsf2004-e.html>

Iranian leader says religious dialogue is alternative to fundamentalism

Speaking during a visit to the World Council of Churches (WCC) in Geneva, the Iranian president Sayyid Mohammad Khatami made a forceful appeal for inter-religious dialogue to be seen as an alternative to religious fundamentalism, and as a source of international peace and stability.

Speaking as a religious personality and an intellectual, President Khatami addressed an audience of religious leaders, diplomats, academics, journalists and staff of the WCC and other ecumenical organizations based in Geneva on 11 December 2003 on the theme of religious dialogue and international relations. The prime minister of Norway, H.E. Kjell Magne Bondevik, and the then WCC general secretary, Rev. Dr Konrad Raiser, responded to his presentation.

Raiser welcomed the commitment to an “open and truthful encounter” manifested by the Iranian leader, and denounced the instrumentalization of religious sentiments by political interests.

The visit of the Iranian leader was made in the context of a long-standing involvement of the WCC in inter-religious dialogue. Since 1995, the WCC has sought to foster regular contacts and conversation with Iranian Islamic leaders and intellectuals, with Christian-Muslim seminars

being organized alternately in Teheran and Geneva.

Information on the visit is available on our website: <http://www.wcc-coe.org/wcc/what/interreligious/khatami-anchor.html>



President Khatami speaking at the Ecumenical Centre at a public lecture on religious dialogue and international relations

Photo: WCC / Catherine Alt

EHAIA: African churches challenge practice and attitudes to HIV/AIDS

“For the churches, the most powerful contribution to combating HIV transmission is to eradicate stigma and discrimination: a key that will open the door for all those who dream of a viable and achievable way of overcoming HIV/AIDS and preventing the spread of the virus.”

This is the vision of the Ecumenical HIV/AIDS Initiative in Africa (EHAIA), set up in 2002 as a joint undertaking of African churches, Northern churches and agencies, and the WCC.

With a project manager based in the WCC in Geneva, four regional coordinators and a theology consultant, EHAIA offers churches in Africa access to information, training, networks and funding to deal with HIV/AIDS in their communities. It helps them to become “AIDS-competent churches”: churches whose teaching and practice counter discrimination against people living with HIV/AIDS; which fully understand the severity of the HIV/AIDS pandemic; which find a role in preventing HIV/AIDS, taking into consideration pastoral, cultural and gender issues; and which provide care, counselling and sup-



A volunteer HIV/AIDS worker visiting a patient at home in a village outside Kampala, Uganda

port for those affected. Hundreds of pastors and lay people have been involved in EHAIA training workshops and other initiatives in recent months.

A whole day was devoted to the challenge of HIV/AIDS at the annual assembly of the All Africa Conference of Churches in Cameroon in November. Resource persons from all parts of Africa, many of them HIV-positive, spoke openly about their

status in a special morning worship and in Bible study groups. Afternoon group and plenary sessions were run by EHAIA; the day ended with a candlelight march through Yaoundé and the proclamation of a ground-breaking HIV/AIDS covenant, which commits the churches to confronting the pandemic.

Apart from the focus on Africa, the WCC works in other regions to bring the issue of HIV/AIDS to the forefront of community attention. An ecumenical HIV/AIDS consultation in St Petersburg in December 2003, for example, was an effort to develop a common strategy to respond to the emerging epidemic in Central and Eastern Europe.

Participants stated clearly that stigmatization and discrimination against people living with HIV/AIDS are a sin.

See the EHAIA website: <http://www.wcc-coe.org/wcc/what/mission/ehaia-e.html>

And a report of the St Petersburg consultation: <http://www2.wcc-coe.org/pressreleasesen.nsf/index/pu-03-52.html>

People

HONOURS:

- Honouring the life of lay leader and ecumenist **Dr Kathleen Bliss** (1908-89) and her husband Rev. Rupert Bliss, a plaque was laid on 6 December 2003 at Semley, near Salisbury in the UK. The WCC was represented at the memorial ceremony by its former vice moderator Dr Pauline Webb. In a tribute to Bliss, then-outgoing WCC general secretary Rev. Dr Konrad Raiser recalled her contribution to the WCC's first assembly in 1948: “The words ‘We intend to stay together’ in the assembly message [attributed to Bliss] have constantly reminded the churches of the spirit that brought them together in 1948 and that keeps them together till today.”

- Seven members of Poland's Orthodox Church were decorated with the country's Gold Cross of Merit for work in ecumenism and social work at a ceremony in Warsaw's presidential palace on 17 November 2003. Among those honoured was **Mirosław Matrenczyk**, programme executive of the WCC Białystok-based Eastern Europe office. The office was set up in 1994 to coordinate ecumenical and service programmes in Russia, Belarus, Ukraine and the Central Asian republics.

NEW STAFF APPOINTMENTS:

- **Denyse Léger** from Canada took up the position of coordinator of the WCC library and archives in May 2003. A Roman Catholic, Léger's extensive experience as a librarian and project manager includes ten years in Africa as well as positions at the United Nations, the US Agency for

International Development, the Canadian International Development Agency, the University of Montreal, and private consulting firms.

- **Lina Moukheiber** from Lebanon began work as executive secretary of the relocated (to Beirut) WCC Middle East desk on 1 January 2004. A member of the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Antioch, Mukheiber was previously director of development at the St George Hospital University Medical Centre in Lebanon. Former posts include a decade of service as regional health coordinator of the Middle East Council of Churches (MECC).

OBITUARIES:

- On 25 January 2004, **Rev. Canon Dr John Aves**, honorary canon of Norwich cathedral, UK, died of a heart attack in Bethlehem where he was serving as a WCC ecumenical companion. Aves was 52. His work with Israeli peace groups and in the Deheisha refugee camp signalled his commitment to non-violent action, while the stories he wrote as an EA showed his compassion, comprehension and deep understanding of each person he met. Alison Elliot, WCC Commission of the Churches on International Affairs (CCIA) member from Scotland, represented the Council at the 6 February funeral in Norwich.

- The former general secretary of the Finnish ecumenical council, **Dr Inga-Brita Castrén**, died on 31 December 2003 at the age of 84. Castrén worked with the WSCF and the YWCA in the 1960s, and

joined the WCC in 1969 as executive secretary for mission education, returning to Finland in 1973.

- Swedish church leader and ecumenist **Dean Olle Engström** died on 26 December 2003 at the age of 83. A member of both the central and executive committees of the WCC, Engström contributed to the creation of Sweden's national Christian council and from 1962 to 1985 was the principal of the Mission Covenant Church's theological seminary.

- A minister of the Evangelical Church of Czech Brethren and distinguished professor of religion and systematic theology, **Rev. Jan Milic Lochman** died on 21 January 2004 at the age of 81. From 1968 to 1975, Lochman was a member of the WCC central and executive committees, and served on its Faith and Order Commission from 1975 to 1991; from 1970 to 1982, he chaired the World Alliance of Reformed Churches' theology department.

- A Methodist pastor from Zürich, **Dr Theo Tschuy** died on 8 December 2003 at the age of 78. After serving from 1961 to 1971 as Latin America secretary of the WCC, he worked as associate general secretary of SODEPAX, the joint committee for society, development and peace between the WCC and the Roman Catholic Church. From its termination in 1980 until his retirement, he was responsible for the Churches' Human Rights Programme for the Implementation of the Helsinki Final Act.

Witness, service and solidarity shape WCC presence in the Middle East

A region where Christians today form a small but ancient minority, the Middle East is home to twelve WCC member churches, and to others which, while not directly part of the Council, relate to one or other member church in the region. While the number of Christians has decreased dramatically in recent years, these communities remain vibrant and visible parts of society throughout the region, from Egypt to Iraq.

The WCC's work in the Middle East has many facets. One is advocacy: the Council has been addressing the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, including the status of Jerusalem, since its foundation in 1948. Over the years, the WCC has repeatedly advocated for a just solution to the conflicts which respects the history and rights of all communities, and has intervened with the UN, governments and other actors.

The Ecumenical Accompaniment Programme in Palestine and Israel (EAPPI) is a significant example of how WCC is linking work at the local and global levels. Launched in 2002, the EAPPI accompanies Palestinians and Israelis in their non-violent actions and concerted advocacy efforts to end the illegal occupation of the West Bank. Supported by a network of WCC



In the Palestinian city of Nablus, the Greek Orthodox Church at Jacob's well is being rebuilt

member churches and ecumenical partners, volunteer ecumenical companions monitor and report violations of human rights and international humanitarian law, offer protection through non-violent presence, engage in public advocacy and stand in solidarity with the churches and all those struggling against the occupation.

The WCC maintains close relations with member churches in the region. Following consultations, a new office was established in Beirut in early 2004 to provide a tangible ecumenical presence in the region. More awareness of local needs,

Photo: Paul Jeffrey/ACT International

a better flow of information from the Middle East to Geneva, and more active engagement in the life of the churches are hoped-for outcomes. Together with local churches and the Middle East Council of Churches, the WCC plans to open an ecumenical centre in Jerusalem. A fourth aspect of the WCC presence in the Middle East is commitment to humanitarian aid and relief work. Action by Churches Together (ACT) International – a global alliance of 195 Protestant and Orthodox churches and related aid agencies founded by the WCC and the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) – works

through local churches and partners, providing humanitarian assistance, healing the sick, setting up job training programmes, and helping rebuild a functioning civil society. ACT is currently operational in Iraq, Iran and in Israel-Palestine.

See EAPPI website: <http://www.eappi.org/>
ACT International website: <http://act-intl.org/>

WCC International Affairs webpages: <http://wcc-coe.org/wcc/what/international/index-e.html>

News briefs

CHRISTIANS WORLDWIDE PRAY FOR UNITY AND PEACE

Churches around the world mobilized to mark the 18-25 January Week of Prayer for Christian Unity 2004. Focused on the theme "My peace I give to you" (John 14:27), the material for this year was based on proposals from the churches in Aleppo, Syria. The Week is jointly organized by the WCC and the Vatican's Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity. The material for the 2005 edition has been prepared by churches in Slovakia.

<http://wcc-coe.org/wcc/what/faith/wop-index.html>

FIRST WCC "ADVOCACY WEEK" IN NEW YORK

The situation of human rights ten years after the Vienna Declaration; peace processes in Israel/Palestine and Sudan; and principles for international intervention where violence or genocide threaten basic human rights, were some of the issues discussed at WCC's "International Affairs and Advocacy Week", which gathered hundreds of church and NGO activists in New York

City, 10-14 November 2003. The gathering is planned as an annual event.

http://www.wcc-coe.org/wcc/press_corner/advocacyweek-prog.html

RAISER'S LAST OFFICIAL VISITS TO WCC MEMBER CHURCHES

Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew I reaffirmed his commitment to ecumenical dialogue and to the work of the WCC during the official visit of former WCC general secretary Rev. Dr Konrad Raiser to the Ecumenical Patriarchate in Istanbul, Turkey, 29 November to 3 December 2003. It was Raiser's last visit as general secretary to a WCC member church. Earlier in the year, a 10-day (7-16 October) visit to Angola focused on the theme of "Healing the Land". During his stay, Raiser visited a transit camp for displaced people and a seminary, and met a large gathering of young people, church leaders, and the country's President Eduardo do Santos.

WCC FILM WINS INTERNATIONAL FESTIVAL PRIZE

"Roots of Violence", a film about Sierra Leone produced by the World Council of Churches for Danish television, won a

prize as the best film in the inter-religious dialogue category at the 2003 edition of the International Festival of Cinema and Religion in Trento, Italy. Directed by Anders Laugesen and produced by WCC's Peter Williams, the film features Muslims and Christians talking about their experiences of violence, and how they perceived God during the country's civil war.

<http://wcc-coe.org/wcc/news/videos/roots-of-violence.html>

NEW CONFIGURATION OF THE ECUMENICAL MOVEMENT

Meeting in Antelias, Lebanon, from 17-20 November 2003, a consultation of 36 church leaders, youth representatives, ecumenists, theologians and social scientists from different constituencies, traditions and regions called for broad participation and more intensive consultation about a new configuration of the ecumenical movement. A consultation report as well as other documents are available at:

http://wcc-coe.org/wcc/press_corner/newconfig-docs.html

More news on: www.wcc-coe.org

WORLD
COUNCIL
OF
CHURCHES

Konrad Raiser decorated by Armenian church

Rev. Dr Konrad Raiser received the order of St Mesrob Mashdotz from WCC central committee moderator H.H. Aram I, the Catholicos of the Armenian Apostolic Church (Cilicia), on 18 November 2003. In decorating the former WCC general secretary, Aram I praised Raiser as a man of "quality, vision and commitment" whose values have "enriched the ecumenical witness of the WCC". The ceremony took place in Antelias, Lebanon, at the Armenian Catholicosate.



WCC Decade: cont. from page 1

their government representatives, they work to end violence in the Middle East and other parts of the world. But as far as the US government is concerned, a national debate is going on about how to use the United Nations and other legal

institutions to ensure a less violent world. Some say that removing Saddam Hussein from power was a contribution to world peace. Others disagree. I believe this is a critical debate for us as Americans. This year's focus of the Decade to Overcome Violence was chosen by the

WCC central committee in August 2003 following the vocal opposition of US churches to the war in Iraq, and their efforts to alleviate suffering at home and abroad. *Further information at: www.overcomingviolence.org*

WCC News Reader Survey

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NEW WCC ONLINE INFORMATION SERVICE

Keep up to date on what the WCC is doing by registering with the new WCC online information service. WCC online information service lets you receive regular updates on WCC news and events. You can also indicate your special interests, and subscribe to WCC periodicals and electronic newsletters. Please visit our registration page to sign up for WCC online information services:
www.onlineservices.wcc-coe.org.

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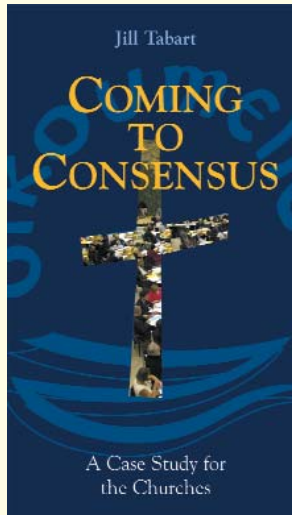
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<http://www.wcc-coe.org/wccnews>



COMING TO CONSENSUS: A Case Study for the Churches
 Jill Tabart relates the experience of the Uniting Church in Australia in moving to the use of the consensus method in making decisions, from the birth of the idea to the model used

currently, a process of several years during which constant evaluation aided continuous improvement. A resource for church councils at every level. The author was an architect of the consensus procedures used by the UCA, serving as president of the national assembly of her church at the time the procedures were introduced.
 86pp., *Risk Book Series*, CHF14.00, USD10.95, GBP5.95, EUR8.95



HOW JUST IS THE MARKET ECONOMY?
 This study in economic ethics focuses on the "world market" as an ideology, a formal theory and a practical device. It analyzes the tendency of economists to elaborate and impose market theory as dogma. Such

approaches are contrasted with principles of justice found in the Bible and the social theory of John Calvin. The author concludes that market mechanisms must be supplemented by additional tools to ensure that world needs may be fairly and correctly met. Edward Dommen is an economist, formerly on the staff of the UN Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD).
 86pp., *Risk Book Series*, CHF18.00, USD13.95, GBP7.95, EUR11.50

Musa W. Dube, ed.
HIV/AIDS AND THE CURRICULUM: Methods of Integrating HIV/AIDS in Theological Programmes

Essays by young African scholars proposing a pattern of Christian education designed to

equip churches for ministry in a time of crisis. Theological institutions are urged to address the HIV/AIDS pandemic through the academic disciplines of ministerial preparation as well as in continuing education opportunities, short courses for laity and training-of-trainers seminars for parish workers. Includes practical guides for classroom discussion and a detailed curriculum for theological institutions in Africa, easily adaptable for other regions.

Musa W. Dube, formerly the WCC's HIV/AIDS theological consultant for the region of Africa, teaches New Testament at Scripps College, Los Angeles CA, USA.
 188pp., *Risk Book Series*, CHF25.00, USD17.50, GBP11.30, EUR16.20

Jim Forest
THE RESURRECTION OF THE CHURCH IN ALBANIA

The church in Albania has, in the last decade, gone through dramatic changes with the fall of communism in Eastern Europe. Albania was the first officially atheist state in the world, and all forms of religious expression were suppressed after 1967. The Orthodox Church, the oldest and largest Christian community in Albania has, since the fall of communism, been transformed from a repressed church into a vibrant, rapidly growing and inspired force for renewal and reconciliation in the country. The personal stories in this book present fascinating historical background and an inspiring story of current church witness.

Jim Forest has written a considerable number of books on the Orthodox Church and aspects of religious life.
 128pp. *illustrated*, CHF26.00, USD15.95, GBP10.95, EUR17.00

VIDEO: BREAKING BARRIERS

What happens when Christians from around the world experience worship and Christian reality in the Middle East? Adela Peeva, an independent Orthodox video producer from Bulgaria, documents the experiences of participants in the "Course for Leaders in Lay Training" of OIKOSNET and the WCC in Egypt, Lebanon and Cyprus. Worship with the Coptic Orthodox, dialogue between Christians and Muslims, social problems - this sensitive film shows how our world-view and understanding expand when people meet face to face.

English VHS/PAL - VHS/NTSC, running time 25 mins; CHF29.50, USD19.50, EUR19.70 plus postage

INFORMATION AND ORDERS:

publications@wcc-coe.org,
 and www.wcc-coe.org/wcc/news/pubs
 Credit cards accepted (Visa/Mastercard)
 See left for mailing address, telephone and fax numbers

WCC Decade to focus in 2004 on “the power and promise of peace” in the USA

“The power and promise of peace” is the compelling theme for activities being carried out this year within the framework of the *WCC Decade to Overcome Violence* (DOV), which in 2004 is focusing on the USA.

The DOV’s US focus aims at strengthening and resourcing churches and movements working for peace in the USA. It seeks to encourage a commitment to mutual accountability, and to deepen the churches’ understanding of issues such as power, militarism and community-building. A series of events throughout the year will involve all WCC member churches in the country. *WCC News* asked Rev. Dr Bernice Powell Jackson from the United Church of Christ in USA to comment on the US focus. Powell Jackson is one of the spokespersons for the year.

How can churches around the world strengthen the US churches’ witness and commitment to peace?

Speaking with a common voice gives great power to the message of non-violence. If the churches of the world can speak out with that common voice to the governments and to the people of the world, then justice and peace will prevail. In the USA, there is great enthusiasm among those who are committed to working for peace and justice in our churches. We are excited about the 2004 focus as an opportunity to raise aware-

ness in our country about the many ways in which we can work to overcome violence in our world.

What do the US WCC member churches expect as a result of this year-long focus?

We hope this focus will strengthen our work together and our commitment to overcome violence. We are looking not only at the violence of war, but also at the violence of the entertainment industry, particularly that found in video games, and at the systemic violence of poverty and racism. We are observing our “Lenten fast from violence” – sponsored each year since the Decade began by the US Conference of the WCC. This initiative invites Christians to abstain from consuming and supporting violence, and to make special offerings to support peace-making and reconciliation efforts. (See www.wcc-usa.org).

How is the US as a nation contributing to a less violent and more peaceful world?

There are many individual Americans who care deeply about violence and who work daily to end it. They work in domestic violence shelters, on behalf of abused women and children, they are involved in the peace movement, they protest militarism, they write letters to

Cont. on page 5

Plans for global mission conference in 2005 gather momentum



The Pendeli monastery, just outside Athens, hosted a 24-28 November meeting of the conference planning committee

Plans are being finalized for the Conference on World Mission and Evangelism (CWME), which will be held in Athens, Greece, 9-16 May 2005, earlier than originally planned.

This will be the sixth world conference since the integration of the International Missionary Council into the WCC in 1961, and it will be the first time that an ecumenical mission conference is held in a predominantly Orthodox context.

The event promises to be one of the widest international consultations on mission and evangelism, going beyond the WCC membership to include Roman Catholic, Evangelical and Pentecostal churches. The conference theme, decided in 2003, is “Come, Holy Spirit, Heal and Reconcile”. A conference organizer, Beate Fagerli from Norway, took up her duties within the WCC Mission and Ecumenical Formation team in August 2003. According to Rev. Ruth Bottoms, a Baptist pastor from the UK who is moderator of both the Commission on World Mission and Evangelism and of the conference’s planning committee, “In our globalized and fragmented world, filled with much division and conflict, the gospel message of healing and reconciliation is vital. But Christians cannot be credible witnesses to the world with so much fragmentation in the churches. So the conference is also about how God speaks to us.”

The conference organizers aim to “enthuse and energize” the 500 participants, in order that they can become multipliers in their own context after the event itself.

Further information is available on the CWME website: www.mission2005.org

