

Economy of Life, Justice, and Peace for All: A Call to Action

As a follow-up to the Alternative Globalization Addressing People and Earth (AGAPE) process, which concluded with the AGAPE Call presented at the 9th Assembly of the World Council of Churches (WCC) in Porto Alegre in 2006, the WCC initiated a programme focused on eradicating poverty, challenging wealth accumulation and safeguarding ecological integrity based on the understanding that Poverty, Wealth and Ecology (PWE) are integrally related. The PWE programme engaged in on-going dialogue between religious, economic and political actors. Participants included ecumenical leaders, representatives and leaders of churches from all over the world, interfaith partners, leaders of government and social service organizations, and it represented a rich variety of the world's regions and nations. Regional studies and consultations took place in Africa (Dar es Salaam) in 2007, Latin America and the Caribbean (Guatemala City) in 2008, Asia and the Pacific (Chiang Mai) in 2009, Europe (Budapest) in 2010 and North America (Calgary) in 2011. The programme culminated in a Global Forum and AGAPE celebration in Bogor, Indonesia in 2012. The call to action that follows is the result of a six-year process of consultations and regional studies linking poverty, wealth and ecology.

Preamble

1. This call to action comes in a time of dire necessity. People and the Earth are in peril due to the over-consumption of some, growing inequalities as evidenced in the persistent poverty of many in contrast to the extravagant wealth of a few, and intertwined global financial, socio-economic, ecological and climate crises. Throughout our dialogue, we as participants in consultations and regional studies expressed differing, sometimes even contrasting, perspectives. We also grew to share a common consciousness that life in the global community as we know it today will come to an end if we fail to confront the sins of egotism, callous disregard and greed which lie at the root of these crises. With a sense of urgency, we bring this dialogue to the churches as a call to action. This urgency is born of our profound hope and belief: *An Economy of Life is not only possible, it is in the making—and God's justice lies at its very foundation!*

Theological and Spiritual Affirmations of Life

2. The belief that God created human beings as part of a larger web of life and affirmed the goodness of the whole creation (Genesis 1) lies at the heart of biblical faith. The whole community of living organisms that grows and flourishes is an expression of God's will and works together to bring life from and give life to the land, to connect one generation to the next, and to sustain the abundance and diversity of God's household (*oikos*). Economy in God's household emerges from God's gracious offering of abundant life for *all* (John 10:10). We are inspired by Indigenous Peoples' image of "Land is Life" (*Macliing Dulag*) which recognizes that the lives of people and the land are woven together in mutual interdependence. Thus, we express our belief that the "creation's life and God's life are intertwined" (*Commission on World Mission and Evangelism*) and that God will be all in all (1 Corinthians 15:28).

3. Christian and many other expressions of spirituality teach us that the "good life" lies not in the competitive quest for possessions, the accumulation of wealth, fortresses and stockpiles of armaments to provide for our security, or in using our own power to lord it over others (James 3: 13-18). We affirm the "good life" (*Sumak Kausay* in the Kichua language and the concept of *Waniambi a Tobati Engros* from West Papua) modeled by the communion of the Trinity in mutuality, shared partnership, reciprocity, justice and loving-kindness.

4. The groaning of the Creation and the cries of people in poverty (Jeremiah 14:2-7) alert us to just how much our current social, political, economic and ecological state of emergency runs counter to God's vision for life in abundance. Many of us too easily deceive ourselves into thinking that human desires stand at the centre of God's universe. We construct divisions, barriers and boundaries to distance ourselves from neighbour, nature and God's justice. Communities are fragmented and relationships broken. Our greed and self-centredness endanger both people and planet Earth.

5. We are called to turn away from works that bring death and to be transformed into a new life (*metanoia*). Jesus calls humanity to repent of our sins of greed and egotism, to renew our relationships with the others and creation, to restore the image of God, and to begin a new way of life as a partner of God's life-affirming mission. The call of the prophets is heard anew from and through people submerged in poverty by our current economic system and those most affected by climate change: Do justice and bring a new Earth into being!

6. Our vision of justice is rooted in God's self-revelation in Jesus Christ who drove money changers from the temple (Matthew 21:12), made the weak strong and strong weak (1 Corinthians 1:25-28), and redefined views of poverty and wealth (2 Corinthians 8:9). Jesus identified himself with the marginalized and excluded people not only out of compassion, but because their lives testified to the sinfulness of the systems and structures. Our faith compels us to seek justice, to witness to the presence of God and to be part of the lives and struggles of people made weak and vulnerable by structures and cultures—women, children, people living in poverty in both urban and rural areas, Indigenous Peoples, racially oppressed communities, people with disabilities, Dalits, forced migrant workers, refugees and religious ethnic minorities. Jesus says "Whatever you did to the least of these you did to me" (Matthew 25: 40).

7. We must embody a "transformative spirituality" (*Commission on World Mission and Evangelism*) that re-connects us to others (*Ubuntu* and *Sansaeng*), motivates us to serve the common good, emboldens us to stand against all forms of marginalization, seeks the redemption of the whole Earth, resists life-destroying values and inspires us to discover innovative alternatives. This spirituality provides the means to discover the grace to be satisfied with enough, while sharing with any who have need (Acts 4:35).

8. Churches must be challenged to remember, hear and heed Christ's call today: "The time has come ... The kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the good news!" (Mark 1:15). We are called to be transformed, to continue Christ's acts of healing and reconciliation and "to be what [we] have been sent to be—a people of God and a community in the world" (*Poverty, Wealth, and Ecology in Africa*). Therefore, the Church is God's agent for transformation. The Church is a community of disciples of Jesus Christ, who affirms the fullness of life for all, against any denial of life.

Intertwined and Urgent Crises

9. Our present stark global reality is so fraught with death and destruction that we will not have a future to speak of unless the prevailing development paradigm is radically transformed and justice and sustainability become the driving force for the economy, society and the Earth. Time is running out.

10. We discern the fatal intertwining of the global financial, socio-economic, climate, and ecological crises accompanied in many places of the world by the suffering of people and their struggle for life. Far-reaching market liberalization, deregulation and unrestrained privatization of goods and services are exploiting the whole Creation and dismantling social programs and services and opening up economies across borders to seemingly limitless growth of production. Uncontrolled financial flows destabilize the economies of an increasing number of countries all over the world. Various aspects of climate, ecological, financial and debt crises are mutually dependent and reinforce each other. They cannot be treated separately anymore.

11. Climate change and threats to the integrity of creation have become the significant challenge of the multifaceted crises that we have to confront. Climate change directly impacts peoples' livelihoods, endangers the existence of small island states, reduces the availability of fresh water and diminishes Earth's biodiversity. It has far-reaching impacts on food security, the health of people and the living habits of growing part of population. Due to climate change, life in its many forms as we know it can be irreversibly changed within the span of a few decades. Climate change leads to the displacement of people, to the increase of forced climate migration, and to armed

conflicts. Unprecedented challenges of climate change go hand-in-hand with the uncontrolled exploitation of natural resources and leads to the destruction of the Earth and to a substantial change of the habitat. Global warming and ecological destruction become more and more a question of life or death.

12. Our world has never been more prosperous, and, at the same time, more inequitable than it is today. Inequality has reached a level that we can no longer afford to ignore. People who have been submerged into poverty, driven into overwhelming debt, marginalized, and displaced are crying out with a greater sense of urgency and clarity than ever before. The global community must recognize the need for all of us to join hands together and to do justice in the face of unparalleled and catastrophic inequalities in the distribution of wealth.

13. Greed and injustice, seeking easy profit, unjust privileges and short-term advantages at the expense of long term and sustainable aims are root causes of the intertwined crises and cannot be overlooked. These life-destroying values have slowly crept in to dominate today's structures and lead to lifestyles that fundamentally defy the regenerative limits of the Earth and the rights of human beings and other forms of life. Therefore, the crisis has deep moral and existential dimensions. The challenges that are posed are not first and foremost technological and financial, but ethical and spiritual.

14. Market fundamentalism is more than an economic paradigm: it is a social and moral philosophy. During the last thirty years, market faith based on unbridled competition and expressed by calculating and monetizing all aspects of life has overwhelmed and determined the direction of our systems of knowledge, science, technology, public opinion, media and even education. This dominating approach has funnelled wealth primarily toward those who are already rich and allowed humans to plunder resources of the natural world far beyond its limits to increase their own wealth. The neoliberal paradigm lacks the self-regulating mechanisms to deal with the chaos it creates with far-reaching impacts, especially for the impoverished and marginalized.

15. This ideology is permeating all features of life, destroying it from the inside as well as from the outside, as it seeps into the lives of families and local communities, wreaks havoc upon the natural environment and traditional life-forms and cultures, and spoils the future of the Earth. The dominant global economic system in this way threatens to put an end to both the conditions for peaceful coexistence and life as we know it.

16. The one-sided belief that social benefits automatically follow from economic (GDP) growth is misguided. Economic growth without constraints strangles the flourishing of our own natural habitat: climate change, deforestation, ocean acidification, biodiversity loss and so on. The ecological commons have been degraded and appropriated, through the use of military force, by the political and economic elite. Over-consumption based on the costs of uncovered debts generates massive social and ecological indebtedness, which are owed by the developed countries of global North to the global South, as well as indebtedness over against the Earth, is unjust and creates enormous pressure on future generations. The notion that the Earth is the Lord's and everything in it (Psalm 24: 1; 1 Corinthians 10: 26) has been dismissed.

Well-Springs of Justice

17. We confess that churches and church members are complicit in the unjust system when they partake in unsustainable lifestyles and patterns of consumption and remain entangled in the economy of greed. There are churches who continue to preach theologies of prosperity, self-righteousness, domination, individualism and convenience. Some support theologies of charity rather than justice for the impoverished. Others fail to question and even legitimize systems and ideologies founded on unlimited growth and accumulation, and ignore the reality of ecological destruction and the plights of victims of globalization. Some focus on short-term, quantifiable results at the expense of deep-seated, qualitative changes. However, we are also aware that even when many fail to examine and change their own production, consumption and investment

behaviour, an increasing number of churches from all continents are stepping up their efforts and expressing their belief that transformation is possible.

18. Ultimately, our hope springs from Christ's resurrection and promise of life for all. We see evidence of that resurrection hope in the churches and movements committed to making a better world. They are the light and salt of the Earth. We are profoundly inspired by numerous examples of transformation from within the family of churches and in growing movements of women, people in poverty, youth, people with disabilities and Indigenous Peoples who are building an Economy of Life and promoting a flourishing ecology.

19. People of faith, Christian, Muslim and Indigenous leaders in the Philippines, have given their lives to maintain their connection to and to continue to sustain themselves from the land to which they belong. Churches in South America, Africa and Asia are conducting audits of external debts and challenging mining and resource-extractive companies to be accountable for human rights violations and environmental damages. Churches in Latin America and Europe are sharing and learning from differing experiences with globalization and working towards defining common but differentiated responsibilities, building solidarity and strategic alliances. Christians are defining indicators of greed and conducting intentional dialogues with Buddhists and Muslims which discover common ground in the fight against greed. Churches in partnership with civil society are engaged in discussing the parameters of a new international financial and economic architecture, promoting life-giving agriculture and building economies of solidarity.

20. Women have been developing feminist theologies that challenge patriarchal systems of domination as well as feminist economics that embed the economy in society and society in ecology. Youth are in the forefront of campaigns for simple living and alternative lifestyles. Indigenous Peoples are making demands for holistic reparations and the recognition of Earth rights to address social and ecological debt.

Commitments and Call

21. The 10th General Assembly of the WCC is meeting at a time when the vibrant life of God's whole creation may be extinguished by human methods of wealth creation. God calls us to a radical transformation. Transformation will not be without sacrifice and risk, but our faith in Christ demands that we commit ourselves to be transformative churches and transformative congregations. We must cultivate the moral courage necessary to witness to a spirituality of justice and sustainability, and build a prophetic movement for an Economy of Life for all. This entails mobilizing people and communities, providing the required resources (funds, time and capacities), and developing more cohesive and coordinated programs geared toward transforming economic systems, production, distribution, and consumption patterns, cultures and values.

22. The process of transformation must uphold human rights, human dignity and human accountability to all of God's creation. We have a responsibility that lies beyond our individual selves and national interests to create sustainable structures that will allow future generations to have enough. Transformation must embrace those who suffer the most from systemic marginalization, such as people in poverty, women, Indigenous Peoples and persons living with disabilities. Nothing determined without them is for them. We must challenge ourselves and overcome structures and cultures of domination and self-destruction that are rending the social and ecological fabric of life. Transformation must be guided by the mission to heal and renew the whole creation.

23. Therefore, we call on the 10th General Assembly in Busan to commit to strengthening the role of the WCC in convening churches, building a common voice, fostering ecumenical cooperation and ensuring greater coherence for the realization of an Economy of Life for all. In particular, the critical work on building a new international financial and economic architecture (*WCC Statement on Just Finance and an Economy of Life*), challenging wealth accumulation and systemic greed and promoting anti-greed measures (*Report of the Greed Line Study Group*), redressing ecological debt

and advancing eco-justice (*WCC Statement on Eco-justice and Ecological Debt*) must be prioritized and further deepened in the coming years.

24. We further call on the 10th WCC Assembly in Busan to set aside a period of time between now and the next Assembly for churches to focus on faith commitments to an “Economy of Life – Living for God’s Justice in Creation [Justice and Peace for All].” The process will enable the fellowship of churches to derive fortitude and hope from each other, strengthen unity and deepen common witness on critical issues that lie at the very core of our faith.

25. The statement on “Just Finance and an Economy of Life” calls for an ethical, just and democratic international financial regime “grounded on a framework of common values: honesty, social justice, human dignity, mutual accountability and ecological sustainability” (*WCC Statement on Just Finance and an Economy of Life*). We can and must shape an Economy of Life that engenders participation for all in decision-making processes that impact lives, provides for people’s basic needs through just livelihoods, values and supports social reproduction and care work done primarily by women, and protects and preserves the air, water, land, and energy sources that are necessary to sustain life (*Poverty, Wealth, and Ecology in Asia and the Pacific*). The realization of an Economy of Life will entail a range of strategies and methodologies, including, but not limited to: critical self-reflection and radical spiritual renewal; rights-based approaches; the creation and multiplication of spaces for the voices of the marginalized to be heard in as many arenas as possible; open dialogue between global North and global South, between churches, civil society and state actors, and among various disciplines and world faiths to build synergies for resistance to structures and cultures that deny life in dignity for many; taxation justice; and the organization of a broad platform for common witness and advocacy.

26. The process is envisioned as a flourishing space where churches can learn from each other and from other faith traditions and social movements about how a transformative spirituality can counter and resist life-destroying values and overcome complicity in the economy of greed. It will be a space to learn what an Economy of Life means, theologically and practically, by reflecting together and sharing what concrete changes are needed in various contexts. It will be a space to develop joint campaigns and advocacy activities at the national, regional and global levels with a view to enabling policy and systemic changes leading to poverty eradication and wealth redistribution; ecologically-respectful production, consumption and distribution; and to develop healthy, equitable, post-fossil fuel and peace-loving societies.

God of Life calls us to justice and peace.

Come to God’s table of sharing!

Come to God’s table of life!

Come to God’s table of love!