

Document **GR6** final report  
REVISED

STRUGGLING FOR JUSTICE AND HUMAN DIGNITY

INTRODUCTION

Since the Fifth Assembly of the World Council of Churches (Nairobi 1975), churches and the ecumenical movement have made substantial progress in their commitment to justice. They have deepened and broadened their struggle for the human dignity of peoples all over the world.

Significantly, the poor, the oppressed and the discriminated peoples are awakening everywhere to resist unjust powers and to forge their own destiny. This is a sign of life.

At the same time, powers of injustice and of oppression attempt to absolutize and to defend their security through ideological and religious justification.

A new context emerges, therefore, in which the people strive for justice and human rights in various areas of their lives.

OUR BASIC BIBLICAL AND THEOLOGICAL CONVICTIONS

In (Christ) the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily,  
and you have come to fullness of life in him, who is  
the head of all rule and authority  
(Colossians 2 : 9-10)

1. We confess our faith in the Triune God, the giver, redeemer and sanctifier of life. This is why, as Christians and churches, we hope, pray and search for signs of God's Kingdom in His creation. Since Nairobi we struggled towards the vision of a just, participatory and sustainable society.

The machine of the prevailing economic order starves millions of people to death and increases the number of unemployed every year. Science and technology are misused to oppress the people and to destroy the earth in an insane arms race. More and more people are detained and "disappear", tortured, deprived of religious liberty, forcibly displaced or exiled.

We interpret this development as idolatry, stemming from human sin, seduced by satanic forces. We are not in a usual situation, where only prophetic and intercessory actions of the churches are sufficient.

Part of the good power which God shared with humanity in His image involved sharing creative responsibility in the world (Genesis 1: 26-28). The opposite, however, occurred (Genesis 3 : 5). In contemporary terms, the powers of dominion over "nature" (earth, native peoples, manual labour, women) and limitless possessions have become idols. This culture of violence has engendered international security

instruments and institutions. Alliances are built across institutions through continuous economic, military and political collaboration, justified by the distorted doctrines of national security. Such doctrines do not guarantee security of the people, whom the wealthy thus control with technological developments. Social relations are dehumanised and manifestations of life perverted.

A special manifestation of this injustice is the prevailing international economic order. It has institutionalized domination by Northern economies of trade, finance, manufacturing, food processing and knowledge. Handled mainly through transnational corporations, this economic order subordinates and renders dependent the Southern economies.

In sum, we live today to witness the emergence of a new type of abuse of power. As never before, economic interests, military might, technological knowledge and international alliances form a constellation of forces arrayed against the dignity of life in the world: Jesus Christ Himself! The consequences are formidable: immense human suffering, degradation and death.

3. Let us not be misled into pessimism. As a gift of God, power is used and should be used to countervail those who worship the idols of death. It represents the ability of human beings to share God's creation. This positive power is lodged in and among those who love and appreciate the beautiful gift of the Triune God precisely because they have so little. There are deep potentialities manifested among the underprivileged and the poor throughout the ages — powers which affirm dignity and celebrate justice. It is happening now, at this point in history. People seek liberation with justice, with creativity and courage which are the signs of hope in our time. We must affirm the right to share power with equity, because it is shared life. The power of the mighty is confronted with the power of the people: blacks in South Africa, women in peace movements, Minjung (the people) in Korea, poor peasants in Central America. Their struggles show the spiritual force of those who have been called by our Lord "heirs of the Kingdom".

4. To struggle for justice and human dignity we are required to resist abuses by oppressive powers. We are called to be in solidarity with those who build up peoples' power designed to shape a more participatory society by the legitimate exercise of power. Thus, international networks of support, facilitated by the churches, should be strengthened and widened. Churches are called to enable people who resist oppression, combat the roots of injustice and take risks in the search for a new society. Networks help accumulate forces among the poor to resist abusive power. Considered cheap and disposable by the mighty, the lives of the poor -- gifts of God created in and through Jesus Christ -- are shared infinitely as their only resource.

III. THE WEB OF OPPRESSION AND INJUSTICE

The interlinkages among various manifestations of injustice and oppression are becoming ever closer and also clearer. Racism, sexism, class domination, the denial of peoples' rights, caste oppression, are linked together in a structure not unlike that of a spider's web. Singly and together they appropriate and initiate many injustices which are at the root of much suffering and death. Instruments of oppression which maintain and sustain this web vary from the subtle smile of denial to mammoth military machines.

systems designed to assert possession at any cost. It has obsessed industrialized nations and spreads to others.

We confess Jesus Christ, who died on the cross and was resurrected, in whom the whole universe was created, as Lord over the demons and powers of death and over all things (Ephesians 1 : 9-19). We anticipate the victory of the Lamb (Revelation 12 : 21) who inspires suffering and gives courage to martyrs everywhere.

2. Some fundamentalist sects and church people, political parties and governments, would legitimize this development as "Christian". These groups militate against the identification of the churches with the poor in their witness to God's Kingdom.

The Church is thus challenged not only in what it does, but in its very faith and being. Many are alert to the danger, as in the heresy of apartheid. However, the so-called Christian arguments defend exploitative transnational systems, the uncritical applications of science and technology and the production of mass nuclear offensive weapons. In confessing Jesus Christ, churches must confess their sins. Although belatedly, many of them should recognize their complicity in the tolerance of the processes of death, acknowledging the dangers inherent in exorcizing.

3. The spiritual struggle of the Church must involve it in the spiritual struggle of the poor, the oppressed, the alienated, and the exiled. The Spirit is among struggling people. The Spirit kindles love and fills with courage. The Spirit imparts creative vision. Christ's Church celebrates the eucharist as the incarnation of God's love and as the source of all spiritual strength among God's people (Ezekiel 37: 10; Rev. 11: 11).

Christians are called to resist any power that demands complicity in sin. People are tempted to misuse power. Therefore, justified by faith, the people struggle to affirm life as a sign of the coming Kingdom. The widow argued persistently and stubbornly with the judge (Luke 18: 2-5), strongly suggesting to Christians the attitude and energy required to achieve justice and human dignity. The Lord of the Church gives a transcending vision and the patience of martyrs to resist structural support of a sinful system, when He promises "I will be with you always, to the end of the age" (Matthew 28: 20).

#### OPPRESSIVE POWERS AND THE POWER OF LIBERATION

1. God, as the giver of life, is the source of powers, even of those that can be used against His own being (John 19: 11). God provides to life the ability to get upon life, and with love expects that power will be exercised according to His will. Hence power and authority exist with God's permission (Romans 13: 1-2) so as to work for the good of His creation.

2. In our time power is abused tremendously. In spite of the abundance of resources, social disparities widen. Internationally, racism is condemned, yet South African apartheid threatens the territorial integrity of its neighbours. Discrimination, extrajudicial executions, political regression, genocide and violations of socio-economic rights demonstrate the exercise of power against the interests of the people and, indeed, against the people themselves. Power elites concentrate wealth for the control of political institutions and of economic

1. Racism: The global reach of racism was highlighted in the 1980 WCC consultation on "Churches responding to racism in the 1980s". Although the legalized apartheid system in South Africa is the most blatant and hideous form, racism rears its head in all parts of the world. The premeditated violence, and even genocide against indigenous groups, are occurring in too many parts of the world.

Racism is often intensified through international systems whose economic and military factors predominate. Land rights claims of indigenous peoples are often rejected in the name of development and national security. Immigration policies and practices discriminate on the basis of race in parts of Europe and North America. Education policies deny equality of opportunity and employment on the grounds of race. In South Africa, so-called homelands have become dumping grounds for thousands deprived of their birthright, and removed from their homes in the interests of maintaining white supremacy. Resistance often results in banning, arbitrary arrest, detention without trial, and sometimes mysterious deaths under imprisonment. Present constitutional changes promise to reinforce white rule, alienate blacks from one another and prevent their participation in shaping a common, just and peaceful society.

Some churches have begun to deepen their understanding of the root causes of contemporary racism. They also take some courageous action to confront the forces of racism nationally and globally. This has given new hope to the racially oppressed as they defiantly resist entrenched forces of racism. Racism is on the increase, but so are the struggles of the racially oppressed.

2. Sexism: Just as any attitude, action or structure that treats people as inferior because of race is racism, so any domination or exclusion based on sex is sexism. Behind many of the diverse manifestations of sexism are economic factors leading to exploitation and manipulation. Despite the considerable change in the traditional division of labour between men and women, women still have a long way to go in their struggle for equality. The growing phenomenon of sex tourism -- affecting primarily but not exclusively women and girls in some third world countries -- organized by international tourist agencies, is alarming. The abuse of children in this trade adds to this trend.

Violence against women is another reprehensible form of sexism. The physical vulnerability of women is especially abused by rape as an expression of dominance by individuals or by groups of men. In addition, the beating of women brings untold suffering and humiliation. To counteract such violence more study and information is required about the causes and consequences of this evil.

The pernicious influence of the media must be recognized and addressed in such a way as to transform it into a positive instrument to eliminate stereotype prejudices and discriminatory attitudes with regard to race and sex values.

The WCC community study on women and men in the Church, carried out since Nairobi and culminating in the 1981 Sheffield consultation, contributed in identifying the root causes of oppression of women, and furthered the understanding of power as empowerment. In this view, power is not a finite quantity, diminished for one group if acquired by another. Rather, empowerment can be limitless. It is not conceived of as power over someone, or over against one another. It allows those who are oppressed to stand up for themselves and to be full partners in the struggle for justice and dignity, towards the creation of a true community.

Underlying many manifestations of sexism and of racism is class domination based on economic exploitation and profit-motive, cultural captivity, colonialism and neo-colonialism.

It is a sad reality that the churches are often accomplices in the support or tolerance of oppression and domination. In too many instances church life merely reflects its social environment while society's weakest members -- the poor, the racially oppressed, women -- are absent from leadership roles and decision-making processes.

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- to repudiate the misuse of economic organization, science and technology in the service of powers and principalities and against people.

- b) That we ourselves make a clear covenanting commitment to work for justice and peace as it was made here in Vancouver by Central American and USA delegates as a sign of clear resistance to any kind of oppression and as a step forward toward peace with justice.
- c) That we reject the heretical forces which use the name of Christ or "Christian" to legitimize the powers of death.

## 2. Spirituality

- a) That churches explore forms through which Christian spirituality is manifested in the struggle for justice and human dignity. For this purpose, we call churches to cultivate and strengthen the spiritual life among the people, through prayer, Bible study and worship, making justice and human dignity an integral part of churches' life.
- b) That churches and Christians affirm values which popular cultures, other faiths and ideologies contribute to people's common action in the struggle for justice and human dignity.

## 3. Solidarity

- a) That the churches be in solidarity with the poor, oppressed, and discriminated in order to empower their movements and organizations.
- b) That in order to be in solidarity with those who are struggling to redress unjust power structures, especially those who are victims of torture and other forms of violence, all churches increase their efforts of concrete action through:
  1. public exposure and denunciation of torture and all other forms of violence especially against women and children, including domestic violence and rape;
  2. assistance to victims and their families;
  3. the provision of material and legal aid to prisoners of conscience;
  4. prayer meetings of intercession and other expressions of public concern;
  5. providing sanctuary to refugees facing expulsion without due process of law;
  6. the establishment of effective international measures to protect refugees against attacks and refoulement and to assure them access to due process.
- c) That member churches demonstrate their international ecumenical solidarity in combatting unjust economic structures, through:
  1. theological reflection on the principles of work and human dignity, and on new economic paradigm aiming at a just, participatory and sustainable society;
  2. engaging in an intensive process of education of their members regarding the nature of oppressive economic structures and their own complicity in bolstering them;

3. exposing the role of transnational corporations in buttressing unjust economic structures, in undergirding racist regimes, in exploiting women as cheap labour resources; and in using technologies which result in the expulsion of labourers from their jobs and thus create unemployment;
4. a careful examination by churches of their investment portfolios and investment in alternative development and trading networks.

#### Networking

- a) Churches continue to consolidate and expand solidarity linkages and networks between North and South, especially among the "Southern" countries; and foster mutual dialogue between the Eastern and Western churches in order to be more effective.
- b) Churches are called to affirm their commitment to a process of continuous dialogue and mutual visitation, aiming at mutual support for their ministry and solidarity work.
- c) Churches must contribute to efforts which promote confidence-building measures among governments in order to reduce tensions and create a favourable climate for healthy international relations.
- d) Churches are urged to initiate regional commissions and/or programmes for the implementation of Human Rights. Such bodies prove to be very important at the international level in the support of people's struggles for their rights.
- e) Churches are urged to deepen their understanding of the exercise of power for social justice, human liberation, and on matters of political ethics. For this purpose they should engage in an intensive process of education of their members regarding both the nature of principalities and powers which exercise oppression, and their own complicity in them.

#### Financing

- a) Churches are called to support the 2% Appeal as a tool for continuous solidarity with the poor, and for the support of people's movements working for justice and human dignity.
- b) In this regard, the Ecumenical Development Cooperative Society (EDCS) created by the WCC in 1974 to use the investment capital of the member churches for the development projects of the poor and powerless, should be given a high priority.
- c) Churches are urged to give concrete expression of their concern for the work on human rights and social justice through increased financial commitment.
- d) Churches are urged to continue and increase their support for the Special Fund of PCR.

#### IV. THE RIGHTS OF THE PEOPLE

1. The dominant and oppressive powers form a fierce vortex of socio-economic and political dynamics that create grave conditions for violations of peoples' rights in manifold ways, including religious rights and rights of the disabled.
2. Authoritarian and dictatorial powers, perversion of the doctrine of national security, militarization, and the misuse of science and technology in repressive mechanisms, are integral parts of the oppressive process that denies civic, political and cultural rights of the people in many countries.
3. Gross and systematic violations of human rights occur in most societies. People suffer arbitrary arrests, torture, summary executions and disappearance -- almost always in extrajudicial forms, on a scale and with unprecedented frequency.
4. Economic domination and unjust social structures suppress the socio-economic rights of the people, such as the basic needs of families, communities, and the rights of workers.
5. Racial domination denies land rights to indigenous, ethnic and aboriginal peoples, often bringing unlawful imprisonment of entire groups of the population. It is their right to be acknowledged as human beings, fully participating in God's design.
6. Churches are called to be in solidarity with the people and with those who struggle among and alongside them in defending their rights. This includes those among the churches and Christian communities whose witness -- even to martyrdom -- has galvanised the worldwide ecumenical fellowship.

#### V. CONCLUSIONS

Christ rules the world. His people are called to participate in his empowering struggle against the demonic powers of the world.

Churches are called to be a steadfast and faithful witness. As allies of those who struggle for their liberation, churches witness to the reign of the Lamb and are a sure sign of hope in the world.

#### VI. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ECUMENICAL ACTION TO THE CHURCHES

##### 1. Covenanting

- a) That the churches at all levels: congregations, dioceses/synods, networks of Christian groups and base communities, together with the WCC, enter into a covenant in a conciliar process:
  - to confess Christ, the life of the world, as the Lord over the idols of our times, the Good Shepherd who "brings life and life in its fullness" for His people and for all creation;
  - to resist demonic powers of death inherent in racism, sexism, class domination, caste oppression, and militarism;

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