

## ÖRK Botschaft Februar 2012

We, the members of the executive committee of the World Council of Churches, meeting from 14 to 17 February 2012 in Bossey, Switzerland, greet you in the name of the Triune God who dwells among the people to inspire us with hope for peace with justice.

As we are participating in the meeting of the executive committee of the WCC, we take this opportunity to assure the churches, Christians in Syria and the entire Syrian people of our prayers that peace and reconciliation may soon prevail in your country. While we pray, we are reminded that Syria is the land from whence St. Paul spread the Good News of love, peace and justice to the world.

The members of the executive committee who represent WCC constituencies from various parts of the world have discussed the current situation of turmoil in Syria. The report of the WCC general secretary to the executive committee shared information about the "ecumenical conversation on emerging trends in Syria" that was held in Geneva on 9-10 December 2011. We were also informed that about twenty church leaders from all confessional traditions in Syria came together to address their challenges and concerns and to envision their goals and expectations for the future of the Christian presence and witness in the region. We trust that the Christians in Syria are determined to find ways to be messengers of love and to convey the peace of God in Jesus Christ even amidst hostility and violence.

At the last central committee meeting in February 2011, the WCC reiterated its principles that guide the council's policy in the whole Middle East region. These principles include: *"God's justice and love for all of creation, the fundamental rights of all people, respect for human dignity, solidarity with the needy, and dialogue with people of other faiths"*. (Minute on the Presence and Witness of Christians in the Middle East, WCC Central Committee, February 2011)

On behalf of the WCC, the general secretary sent a letter addressed to the Church leaders in Syria, in May 2011, which expressed the Council's deep concern over the widespread violence and the indiscriminate use of force since early March 2011. The general secretary expressed the hope that the cycle of violence will end immediately. Unfortunately, military action and repression have increased and violence has spread over many parts of the country, resulting in the loss of several thousand lives and tens of thousands wounded, internally displaced or forced to find refuge in neighbouring countries and in the whole region. In August 2011, a short statement was also issued condemning the violence.

We are aware of the fact that this is indeed a difficult and crucial moment in the history of your nation and people. Many Christians in Syria also feel uncertain about their future. We strongly support the important message by three heads of churches in Syria, His Beatitude Patriarch Ignatius IV, His Holiness Patriarch Zakka I, and His

Beatitude Patriarch Gregorios III, that was issued on 15 December 2011 to their communities and all citizens in Syria, in which they clearly condemned "*the use of any type of violence*" and called for the "*respect of the principles of justice, freedom, human dignity, social justice and citizenship rights*". The heads of the churches encouraged the people not to fear and not to lose their hope.

We are confident that the churches in Syria, which are deeply rooted in the land, and have developed a long historic experience of engagement in the life of the society, will have an important role in a national dialogue especially in this critical and difficult moment. We are hopeful that such a dialogue will lead to a new reality: a society built on peace with justice, human rights and human dignity, the bases for living together in diversity and mutual respect.

We pray and hope that the ongoing situation of military repression and violence will end soon, and the movements seeking democracy and freedom will achieve their goals through peaceful and nonviolent means. Our prayer and hope is that the current unrest will not undermine the historical and human ties between Christians and Muslims in Syria, as well as in the entire region. We learn from your courage and steadfastness when you remain rooted in your faith and promote Christian ethical values in such critical moments.

In response to the ongoing conflict in your country, we are calling upon WCC member churches to engage in concrete actions of solidarity with you during this time of difficulties. As a fellowship of churches, we are "*to express the common concern of the churches in the service of human need, the breaking down of barriers between people and the promotion of one human family in justice and peace*" (WCC Constitution).

Recognizing your difficulties at this critical juncture of your history, we are also reminded that we are called to be instruments of peace and agents of reconciliation and unity among all people in Syria. Be assured that the entire ecumenical family holds you constantly in prayer. This is an imperative of costly solidarity within the one body of Christ.

"The peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus" (Philippians 4: 7).