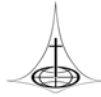




World Council of  
Churches



Lutheran World  
Federation



World Alliance of  
Reformed Churches

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## **Towards an Economy in the Service of Life** a report of an ecumenical journey

*God of Life,*

*You are our God who liberates us from any system of oppression, exclusion and exploitation.*

- I. We shall not make Mammon our God, accumulating power and wealth.*
- II. We shall not make ourselves an idol, worshipping the effectiveness of our achievements.*
- III. We shall not make wrongful use of the name of the Lord God calling the implementation of the wealth accumulating market and imperial wars a Christian policy.*
- IV. We will observe the Sabbath day by not exploiting human labour and destroying Mother Earth.*
- V. We will provide for solidarity between the generations, not only by securing a decent living for the aged but also by not burdening the coming generations with ecological damage and debt.*
- VI. We shall not murder, excluding from the economy those who have no private property or who cannot sell their labour in the market.*
- VII. We shall not tolerate the commodification and sexual exploitation of women and children.*
- VIII. We shall not allow the manifold robberies of economic and financial actors.*
- IX. We shall not misuse the legal system for our personal profit but promote the economic, social and cultural rights of all people.*
- X. We shall not follow the greed of limitless accumulation by depriving our neighbours of their means of production and income so that all may live in dignity on God's rich and beautiful earth.*

*Faith Stance on the Global Crisis of Life, World Alliance of Reformed Churches, Buenos Aires 26 April 2003*



**In memory of Lee, Kyung-Hee,** member of the Presbyterian Church in Korea (PCK), who sacrificed his life at the 5<sup>th</sup> WTO Ministerial in Cancun, Mexico, for the right to live of small-scale farmers. He called for the support of ecumenical organisations during his hunger strike in front of the headquarters of the WTO in Geneva.

During the last decade, all over the world churches started to reflect upon the effects of economic globalisation and the challenges this poses to them. This paper gives an overview of the reflection processes that are taking place within the World Council of Churches (WCC), the World Alliance of Reformed Churches (WARC) and the Lutheran World Federation (LWF), and of the results of ecumenical networking with regard to globalisation. It gives short summaries of the outcomes of conferences organised in the course of these reflection processes. This report, not meant to give a thorough analyses, but to provide a quick overview over what has been done and said so far, concludes with some points of common insights gained during the discussions and questions that arises from the process.

### **1. The WCC and Economic Globalization**

Delegates to the Harare Assembly in 1998 recommended that ‘the challenge of globalization should become a central emphasis of the work of the WCC, building upon many significant efforts of the WCC in the past. The vision behind globalization includes a competing vision to the Christian commitment to the oikoumene, the unity of mankind and the whole inhabited earth.’ ‘The logic of globalization needs to be challenged by an alternative way of life of community in diversity. Christians and churches should reflect on the challenge of globalization from a faith perspective and therefore resist the unilateral domination of economic and cultural globalization. The search for alternative options to the present economic system and the realization of effective political limitations and corrections to the process of globalization and its implications are urgently needed’. The assembly encouraged churches to join the process of recognition, education and confession (processus confessionis) started by the WARC.

### **2. The WARC and the Processus Confessionis**

In 1997 in Debrecen the General Council of the WARC decided unanimously to ‘call for a committed process of progressive recognition, education and confession (processus confessionis) within all member churches at all levels regarding economic injustice and ecological destruction’. Reference was made to (among other things) the Barmen Declaration of the Confessing Church in Germany (1934), especially to the sentence: ‘We reject the false doctrine as if there are realms in our life in which we do not belong to Jesus Christ but to other masters’, and also to the WARC General Council declaration on the Apartheid system in 1982. Covenanting for justice in the economy and the earth as the process is called now implies:

- The churches should pay special attention to the analysis and understanding of economic processes;
- The churches should educate church members at all levels on economic life and how to develop a life style which rejects the materialism and consumerism of our day;
- The churches should work towards the formulation of a confession of their beliefs about economic life which would express justice in the whole household of God;
- The churches should act with the victims of injustice.

Debrecen responded to the call of a consultation held in October 1995 in Kitwe (Zambia): ‘Today the global economy has been sacralized, and elevated to an imperial throne. (...) By redefining what it means to be human, it has become the creator of human beings. Thereby it usurps the sovereignty of God, claiming a freedom that belongs to God. For us as Christians this raises the question of idolatry and of loyalty to God or mammon.’ The consultation concluded: ‘that the African reality of poverty caused by an unjust economic world order has gone beyond an ethical problem and become a theological one. It now constitutes a status confessionis. The gospel of the poor is at stake in the very mechanism of global economy today’. The process will culminate at the next General Council in 2004 in Accra, Ghana.

### **3. LWF on being a communion in a globalizing world**

The Lutheran World Federation has worked on globalization in different ways. It has put a strong emphasis on the human rights issue and the possibilities these offer in the struggle for

more justice. Besides, the LWF has always been and is active in the field of the debt issue and the JUBILEE campaign.

In 2000 the LWF started to organise its own process on globalization, with the title: 'Holding Economic Globalisation Accountable: Challenges and Possibilities through the Communion'. In May 2001 this resulted in the document: 'Engaging Economic Globalization as a Communion'. This document is meant to stimulate the discussion, and churches are called to discuss it on all levels of the churches and report their findings to the LWF. This process culminated in the 2003 LWF Assembly in Winnipeg (Canada).

Central to this process is the idea of the community. 'The challenge is how to engage economic globalization in ways that reflect who we are as a communion - as the body of Christ *throughout* the world - rather than in ways that are driven primarily by our economic self-interests. Some of us reap enormous benefits, while others find our communities and lands devastated by these forces. These disparities cut across our communion, and must be taken into account'. So for the LWF a central point of critique is that globalisation divides people (although it claims to make the world one).

#### **4. WARC and WCC joint activities on globalisation**

One of the first results of the cooperation between WARC and WCC on globalisation was the Symposium on the Consequences of Economic Globalisation in Bangkok, Thailand (November 1999) and, before that, the mini-symposium on Globalisation and the Asian crisis in Seoul, Korea. Statistics only see the first-order consequences of crises like the Asian one: the flood of bankruptcies and layoffs, a general rise in prices due to the depreciation of the currency. Second order consequences occur when policy makers start to develop programmes for 'rapid economic recovery'. In most Southeast Asian countries this meant an austerity programme conditioned by the IMF, which resulted in a rise in taxes on consumption, and a drastic cut of government spending on health and education. The third order effects are perhaps the most impressive and severe; during the consultation several concrete illustrations were given, like the rise of the suicide rate in these countries, the growing illiteracy because parents cannot afford it any longer to send their children to school, the growing migration and the great variety of problems related to this, the breakdown of trust in communities leading to an alarming rise in violence, theft, drug-dealing and other crimes. The Asian crisis cannot be seen as an isolated financial crisis. It has spread like a cancer throughout the whole society, causing continuing damage at the level not only of 'Human capital', but also of social capital and natural capital (loss of care for land, use of more aggressive fertilizers, sale of forests to international investors). The consultations also studied the role of the different actors in the Asian crisis. This led to the thesis that the role of most important actors (the international agencies like IMF, the speculators, the political authorities) in the Asian crisis is open to severe criticism: partly because they acted so clearly in the framework of distorted and reductionist worldviews, and partly because of (strong indications of) unacceptable pressure or force. Some remarkable new initiatives of communities resisting injustice and actions of protest were presented to the consultation. The consultation called upon other churches and church bodies all over the world to discuss the effects of globalization on their societies, and to gather all the information acquired in this way.

#### **5. WARC, WCC, LWF and CEC consultations on Globalisation**

In 2001 the LWF joined the reflection process of WARC and WCC.

##### **a. The Consultation in Budapest: Serve God, not Mammon**

In June 2001 the churches of Eastern Europe discussed with their ecumenical partners in a consultation in Budapest the effects of globalisation on their societies. The report of this meeting is titled: 'Serve God, not Mammon'.

People in Central and Eastern Europe told the meeting they rejoiced, a decade ago, when they realised they were free. But when they review the last ten years it becomes clear that the magnitude and content of the problems encountered have been grossly underestimated by both governments and churches. After the time of stateplanning, politicians and leaders now

embraced the unrestrained market-mechanism as the path to a better future. They did not recognize that a market without social, cultural, and institutional frameworks would rend the very fabric of society. The reports warns that this economic ideology has deeply spiritual implications. People are compelled to invest their faith in the god of money. 'The unregulated flow of capital becomes the arbiter of the economic goodness or badness of all human or political actions'. The meeting called the churches in the West to resist the destructive forces of economic globalization and to be advocates for global social justice.

b. The Fiji Consultation: Island of Hope

The Fiji Consultation in August 2001 in Nadi, was a global consultation with an emphasis on the situation in the Pacific region. Central to the meeting was the presentation of a document called 'The Island of Hope', which, for the Pacific churches, represents life-centred values rooted in Pacific communities, which provide an orientation for a just and sustainable economy and a life of dignity. Components of this vision are 'spirituality, family life, traditional economy, cultural values, mutual care and respect' and that 'prioritises relationships, celebrates quality of life, and values human beings and creation over the production of things'.

c. The Soesterberg Consultation: Economy in the Service of Life

During the Budapest consultations plan were made for a consultation for the Western European Churches, to take place in the Netherlands. It was decided to pay special attention in this consultation to the issue of global capital. For two reasons: during previous consultations the important role of international financial flows and international financial institutions was emphasized. As this is a complicated issue, a special focus during one of the consultations was considered, useful. Beside, the main actors in international finance are governments and institutions in the North. The Canadian churches requested to be allowed to join this consultation of Western European churches.

d. The Buenos Aires Consultation: Seeking Solutions Moving Forward. The Protestant Churches Say 'Enough is Enough'

The Latin American Council invited for a consultation on the Economy for the fullness of Life to Buenos Aires, Argentina. The Protestant Churches of Latin America declared: 'We have reached our limits: we have had enough of such injustices. The globalized economic system is no answer to the evils in our societies. We pray to God that God will inspire us, despite our differences, to walk together the path of justice. We seek cooperation and not confrontation.

e. Consultations in Cartigny 2002 and Bossey 2003

Two consultations on the ecclesiological and ethical dimensions of the joint process on economic globalization were held in Cartigny and Bossey (Switzerland). These consultations included representatives of WARC, LWF, the Anglican Communion, the World Methodist Council, the Ecumenical Patriarchate, the Moscow Patriarchate, the Orthodox Church of Romania and (in Cartigny) the Roman Catholic Church.

*The joint ecumenical process intends to foster dialogue among the churches of different continents on clarity, critique and alternatives to economic globalization and to explore possibilities for common action. This intention was already stated by the first consultation of the process in Bangkok when participants decided to write a message to the Churches in the North:*

Message to the Churches in the North

From the participants of the WCC-WARC-CCA-CCT-ACFOD Symposium on the Consequences of Economic Globalization (12-15 November 1999 Bangkok, Thailand)

The Symposium was jointly organized by the World Alliance of Reformed Churches (WARC), the World Council of Churches (WCC), the Christian Conference of Asia (CCA), the Church of Christ in Thailand (CCT), and the Asian Cultural Forum on Development (ACFOD). It was attended by over 60 people from various sectors of society in Thailand, and from 19 other countries, namely Canada, China, Costa Rica, France, Germany, Great Britain, India, Indonesia, Japan, Korea, Malaysia, Nepal, the Netherlands, the Philippines, South Africa, Sri Lanka, Switzerland, Uganda, and Vanuatu.

Meeting here in Bangkok and coming from different countries in Asia and elsewhere, and comparing the experiences of our economies and people; having listened to the stories and cries of farmers, women, indigenous peoples, fisher folk, the urban poor and slum dwellers of Thailand, and sharing similar experiences as they were reported from India, Indonesia, Korea, Malaysia, Nepal, the Philippines and Sri Lanka; we are struck by the commonality of the extremely deadly consequences of debt and globalization of the economy, on our societies and nature.

We, as a Christian community, affirm that we are the members of the same body of Christ. If one member suffers, all the members suffer with it (I Cor. 12:24). The economy, according to the Reformed tradition, is a social framework that is supposed to sustain the body of Christ. However, today's economic order promoted by neo-liberalism contributes to dismantling the community rather than sustaining it. We were re-convicted by the Bangkok symposium that many members are not only suffering, but also being systemically excluded. Many people in the South say that today's economy is intolerable and people in the North also say so. How can our faith affirmation of being the body of Christ be justifiable if more and more members are suffering and excluded.

Growing impoverishment, increasing inequality in income distributions, casualisation of cheap labour, feminization of the poverty, an increase in child labour and trafficking of children, and ecological destruction affecting the health and livelihood of the rural poor, were revealed by the symposium as concrete consequences of economic globalization based on neo-liberalism. Moreover, poverty, suicide and increase of crimes doubled since Asian countries faced economic crisis and the International Monetary Fund intervened in response to the crisis. The number of poor people in Thailand had increased from 7 millions in 1997 to an estimated 12 millions out of a total population of 63 millions. The suicide rate had also increased from 10 per 100'000 to 14 or 15 per 100'000 and the number of prisoners had increased from 66'000 in 1997 to 170'000 in 1998. Ironically, even as the poor were terribly hit by the economic crisis, the percentage of national income earned by the rich minority had increased from 20.5 % to 22.5 % in Thailand, from 22 % to 24.5 % in Korea, and from 39.3 % to 42.9% in the Philippines. This data shows that the gap between the rich and the poor is widening due to the present trend of economic globalization.

Next to the pains and sufferings in the south, there are the sufferings and threats in the north. We heard about poverty, coming back in even your richest societies; we received reports about environmental destruction also in your midst, and about alienation, loneliness and the abuse of women and children. And all that, while most of your churches are losing members. And we asked ourselves: is most of that not also related to being rich, desiring to become richer than most of you already are? Is there in the Western view on man and society not a delusion present, which always looks to the future and wants to improve it, even when it implies an increase of suffering in your societies and in the south? Did you not forget the richness which is related to sufficiency, enough, saturation? If, according to Ephesians 1, God is preparing in human history that everyone and everything is brought under the Lordship of Jesus Christ, His Shepherd - King - His own globalization, shouldn't then caring and sharing

for and with each other be the main characteristic of our life style, instead of giving fully in to the secular trend of a growing consumerism?

What has happened to our common faith in God, in Christ, and the church universal? What has happened to the basic teaching of common stewardship and Christian solidarity with the suffering neighbour, who are in fact the members of the same body of Christ? We see and experience a contradiction of the above as manifested in the unchallenged idol worship of mammon rather than God.

We are convinced that the time has come for a return to the fundamental and undiluted teachings of the Gospel. It is time for all of us to make a choice: God or mammon. We know that some churches in the North are very active in this regard and we feel strong solidarity with their actions. But the present situation invites us to stand up all together.

We call for concrete acts of solidarity to alleviate the massive suffering of our nations in the North and in the South.

We call for urgent action on your part to address your governments and the institutions that are designing and implementing the present globalization project.

We call for a process of study of the current economic system and its consequences in our midst, in the light of our common faith in Jesus Christ, the Saviour, who showed us caring and sharing as members of God's family.

Economic injustice is a violation of the basic tenets of our common faith. We call on you to join us in confessing that the economy is a matter of faith.