https://acdn.net/spip/spip.php?article535

Statement of hope in a year of opportunity

World Council of Churches: Seeking a nuclear weapon free world

Publication date: Friday 4 September 2009

Copyright © www.acdn.net - All rights reserved

The World Council of Churches' governing committee met in Geneva from 26 August to 2 September 2009. It adopted unanimously a declaration concerning nuclear weapons. It thinks that the international agenda at present offers unprecedented opportunities, between now and June 2010, to make decisive progress towards a world freed from nuclear weapons. It intends to contribute with all its strength.

Nearly 250 protestant and orthodox churches belong to the World Council of Churches. Its declaration can be seen as a major support for the impressive anti-nuclear movement which is currently mobilising NGOs (notably through the "Abolition 2000" world net work), cities (more than 3,000 cities belong to the "Mayors for Peace" network, including 100 in France), and citizens of all countries.

Citizens have a chance to express and show their desire for disarmament during the progress of the World March for Peace and Nonviolence, which has received much support in addition to that of "Mayors for Peace" and "Abolition 2000". The March will begin in Wellington (New Zealand) on October 2, 2009, and will move through France from the 7th to the 12th of November, accompanied by the Hiroshima Flame.

Let us hope that the Catholic Church, which is not part of the World Council of Churches but has observer status, will also subscribe to this declaration - or will issue an equivalent one, inspired by the speechs of the Popes. The church in France, for example, could break her long silence, which has permitted France's nuclear arsenal to grow so big and handsome that it now has the power to cause a billion deaths... which would probably not serve the Glory of God.

ACDN, France, 3 September 2009

"The production and deployment as well as the use of nuclear weapons are a crime against humanity and must be condemned on ethical and theological grounds."

William Thompson, Presbyterian Church USA, Vancouver Assembly, 1983

1. The international community is in a season of hope. Eminent world and national figures now advocate for a world without nuclear weapons, reversing longstanding policies. Global majorities for nuclear disarmament are astir in cities, parliaments, the sciences and religions. President Barack Obama has acknowledged that, as the only nation ever to use nuclear weapons in war, the United States must lead in their elimination. The 65 nation United Nations (UN) Conference on Disarmament has adopted a program of work after a dozen years of political and procedural stalemate. Africa has brought its 1996 nuclear weapon free zone (NWFZ) treaty into force and, with it, nuclear weapons are banned from a majority of the world's countries for the first time. These positive developments must be encouraged and deepened.

2. Seven decades into the nuclear age, the onus for international peace bears down ever harder on the five permanent members of the UN Security Council. Their possession of nuclear weapons is fundamentally incompatible with their privileged responsibility for international peace and security. The 183 non nuclear weapon states still await

Copyright © www.acdn.net

the five nuclear states to fulfil the pledge to eliminate their nuclear weapons.

3. Meanwhile, nuclear forces remain on high alert, nuclear know how, technology and materials are accessible to diverse groups, more nuclear power plants cause increased security and pollution problems, militaries routinely break norms on the use of force and the protection of civilians, and progress toward global public goods is pre-empted by national sovereignty. India, Pakistan, Israel, and, in all likelihood, North Korea possess nuclear weapons outside the treaty. The time to act is now.

4. It is essential for the international community to face up to this great challenge together and to take advantage of a number of promising opportunities that the coming year presents. Churches, international civil society groups, and a world public will be watching governments for convincing evidence of progress, while taking responsibility for action and advocacy themselves. The focus for participation and concern includes:

International Day of Peace, 21 September 2009 - The UN sponsored day merits wide observance. This year it comes with 100 reasons to disarm and builds on the UN secretary general's Five Point Proposal for nuclear disarmament.

International Day of Prayer for Peace, 21 September 2009 - In an agreement with the UN, and as part of the Decade to Overcome Violence, the World Council of Churches (WCC) invites member churches worldwide to make this an annual day of prayer for peace.

US president chairs UN Security Council, 24 September 2009 - A special disarmament session for heads of state chaired by President Obama presents a unique opportunity for the Council's permanent members to acknowledge the essential link between nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation. A collective commitment to far greater transparency in reporting on their nuclear arsenals would be a welcome first step in turning today's inspiring disarmament rhetoric into action. Transparency is feasible, indispensable and long overdue.

UN General Assembly and its First Committee, September-October 2009 - With the spectre of renewed stalemate arising again at the Conference on Disarmament (CD) in Geneva, remedial action at the General Assembly in New York may be needed. If the CD cannot negotiate a Fissile Material Cut-off Treaty now, as it has agreed, it may be necessary for the UN General Assembly and First Committee to charge another appropriate body with the task.

Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (START) renewal, 5 December 2009 - The US and Russia have added hope to this year of opportunity by commencing negotiations. It is urgent that START II sets the target for weapons reductions at the lowest stated level, namely 1,500 nuclear warheads each.

African nuclear weapon free zone - We salute the African states that have ratified the Treaty of Pelindaba and brought it into force, most recently Burundi, Malawi, Mozambique and Ethiopia. We welcome Namibia's progress in this regard and urge completion of all remaining ratifications. We ask that Russia and the US join China, Britain and France in signing the treaty protocols that give Africa added protections. Africa's success demonstrates the new leadership of a 116 country world majority in protecting national territory from nuclear dangers. The Southern Hemisphere and much of the global South thus send an urgent signal to the nuclear dominated north.

Meeting of nuclear weapon free zones, April 2010 - An important political and geographic majority will gather prior to the 2010 Nuclear Proliferation Treaty (NPT) Review Conference. Its agenda is likely to include confidence building measures these zones can undertake, particularly in areas of tension including the Middle East and northeast Asia. Representatives from civil societies, including churches, will be present. States that have established NWFZs will

Copyright © www.acdn.net

seek to consolidate their strength around practical measures. These include accessions to existing treaties, security protocols with nuclear weapon states, and expert groups to address key issues for future NWFZs.

Conclusion of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) security policy review, 2010 - The WCC, the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the US, the Canadian Council of Churches and the Conference of European Churches have called upon NATO to abandon the notion that nuclear weapons preserve peace, and to take full advantage of the current political momentum to eliminate its reliance on nuclear arms, including the removal of foreign nuclear weapons based in five NATO member countries. The joint letter to NATO leaders stated, *"that security must be sought through constructive engagement with neighbours and that authentic security is found in affirming and enhancing human interdependence in God's one creation".*

NPT Review Conference, 2010 - By this much-anticipated mid-year meeting, the nuclear weapon states must have made agreements that confirm their good faith commitment to fulfil more of their disarmament obligations. At minimum, this will include entry into force of the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty, consensus on an advanced draft of the Fissile Material Cut-off Treaty, and agreement on the transparency measures mentioned above. It will also require clear commitment to progress in the next cycle of the NPT including a plan to begin intensive work on a Nuclear Weapons Convention.

The international community stands before a year of opportunity. The central committee of the WCC, meeting in Geneva, Switzerland, 26 August - 2 September 2009:

A. Encourages governments and other parties involved to look to this year of disarmament opportunities with urgency and hope.

B. Challenges the nuclear weapon states to fulfil their *"unequivocal undertaking to accomplish the total elimination of their nuclear arsenals leading to nuclear disarmament"* (2000 NPT Review Conference).

C. Invites churches to support their governments in making whole regions of the world safer from nuclear weapons through the establishment and strengthening of nuclear weapons free zones.

D. Calls upon member churches to declare to their national leaders, *"Transform opportunity into action. Signal your intentions to the global majority who want the elimination of nuclear weapons, and supply the proof of progress. Let a year of cooperation reverse a decade of nuclear deadlock. Reject weapons that should never have been made and that must never be used. Begin now to fulfil the international treaty promise to free the world from nuclear weapons. Put a deadline on this obligation to us all."*

APPROVED BY UNANIMOUS CONSENSUS

Contact: Jonathan Frerichs

Copyright © www.acdn.net