

A CALL to the 11th Assembly of the World Council of Churches in Karlsruhe

(voor de Nederlandse vertaling klik hierboven)

Foreword

The world is on fire in many places: climate change is causing forests to burn, crops that could save countless people from hunger are being burned. The corona pandemic is changing all agendas. The conflict over a new world order is being fought in the war over Ukraine. The rich become more and more shameless and the poor more and more ashamed. Underlying the many crises is a single question: where is your brother? Where is your sister?

Therefore, we are addressing the appeal below to the delegates and to the guests of the World Council of Churches (WCC) Assembly from all parts of the world. It is the result of consultations with ecumenists from Africa, Asia, Europe, and both North and Latin America. We have learned that it is necessary to listen to Mother Earth and the poor, because they are the ones who suffer most from globalized capitalism.

Our call is rooted in the tradition of the ecumenical movement: for example, the Lutheran World Federation condemned neoliberal capitalism as idolatry at its Assembly in Winnipeg in 2003. The World Alliance of Reformed Churches was no different at its 2004 General Assembly in Accra. The 2013 WCC Assembly in Busan noted, "Economic globalization has replaced the God of life with Mammon, the god of free market capitalism, which claims the power to save the world through the accumulation of inordinate wealth and prosperity." Pope Francis condemns capitalism as an "economy that kills." In their official documents, the churches have come to a unanimity that is historically unique: The prevailing capitalism is a destructive religion; it is to be rejected as idolatry.

Meanwhile, the world situation is getting worse and worse, the announced catastrophes have long since arrived. The question is not only: Where is your brother, where is your sister? We must ask: Who is your brother, who is your sister? Our call is an appeal for a universal brotherhood as the core of a shared utopia of justice, peace and integrity of creation.

Martin Gück & Franz Segbers (Kairos Europa)

This economy kills: Hearing the cry of the Earth and the poor and breaking the chains of injustice for all creation (Isa 58:6)

1. Introduction

In the middle of the Covid-19 pandemic and a new spiral of military violence and arms build-up, and facing the tipping points of climate catastrophe, we are rereading past resolutions of the ecumenical movement. The 2003 Assembly of the Lutheran World Federation in Winnipeg denounced the subordination to an absolutized neoliberal market as idolatry. In 2004, the General Council of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches in Accra, responding to the (then) global economic injustice and ecological destruction, confessed in a "Faith Commitment" that the integrity of faith is at stake in remaining silent or inactive in the face of a destructive (neo-)imperial economic system. The 2013 World Council of Churches (WCC) Assembly in Busan declared in its Mission Statement that the rule of the market is "a global system of Mammon," which through endless exploitation alone protects the limitless growth of the wealth of the rich and powerful and meanwhile threatens the entire eco-household of God: "The reign of God is in direct opposition to the empire of Mammon." Pope Francis, at the same time, characterized capitalism as a "dance around the golden calf" and stated, "This economy kills." So there is ecumenical agreement in the clear rejection of the prevailing economic order. This broad ecumenism is of historical significance.

Since then, the world situation has dramatically worsened. In a sense, we live in a different world today, a world on the brink. Therefore, in view of the upcoming 11th Assembly of the WCC in Karlsruhe, we want to take stock of the "signs of the times," reflect on them theologically and ethically, and call the ecumenical movement to action. The Assembly should confess the God of life in a world that has "fallen among robbers" (Lk 10:29); all should have "life in abundance" (Jn 10:10), as there is enough for all.

2. The world in a state of emergency – people are dying, the Earth is burning

With the financial crisis of 2008/9 and the deep recession resulting from the Covid-19 pandemic, global economic disruptions on an unprecedented scale have occurred in the recent past. On both occasions, the global economy was only saved from collapse thanks to unprecedented interventions by governments and

multilateral institutions. The cost of these extreme crises has been and continues to be borne primarily by the most vulnerable, as well as by the natural environment. This not only makes achieving the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) more distant, but has meanwhile even caused hardship and misery to increase again.

In addition, serious threats to human security are also arising from the changing realities of the "world order." Not least, the war in Ukraine is evidence of growing hegemonic rivalries between imperial powers in the conflict over the reconfiguring of geopolitical power spheres. We are seeing the spread of a chaotic, contradictory and militarized world disorder that protects the interests of the few. The world is thus in multiple global crises:

- The global financial system remains inadequately regulated, and the next crash is only a matter of time;
- digitalization commodifies and privatizes public goods in favor of internet giants like Google, Amazon or Facebook, and technological progress first and foremost intensifies economic rationalization and exploitation – with the consequence of an ever deeper division between highly qualified, well-paid IT jobs on the one hand and precarious, poorly paid "service delivery jobs" on the other;
- the over-exploitation of nature is increasing dramatically; especially in the Global South, it is all too often accompanied by serious human rights violations such as the illegal appropriation of land, evictions and the murder of activists;
- the social divide between rich and poor is taking on increasingly scandalous forms both globally and nationally. The wealth of the eight richest people is equal to that of the poorer half of the world's population, and even during the Covid crisis, the ten richest people in the world were able to make more profits than it would cost to vaccinate everyone in the world;
- the severe ecological crisis is the flip side of the social crisis: between 1990 and 2015, the richest 1 percent (63 million people) emitted more than twice as much climate-damaging CO₂ than the poorer half of the world's population taken together. Currently, a quarter of the world's population, predominantly in the Global North, consumes three-quarters of the resources and generates three-quarters of the waste and emissions;
- with the Covid-19 pandemic as an expression of society's destructive relationship with nature, ecological devastation is literally taking on epidemic proportions;
- the Earth is becoming dramatically more inhospitable, and more and more people are forced to migrate from their countries;
- about 40 percent of the gross world product and two thirds of global trade are in the hands of just 500 corporations; their growing power increases democratic deficits and undermines public interests;
- right-wing populism is on the rise worldwide, leading to a spread of authoritarian regimes and eroding citizens' confidence in democracy;
- violence, war and arms build-up have once again become the means to impose a new world order based not on the rule of law but on power.

Humanity is undoubtedly at a crossroads – especially since the window of opportunity to prevent the worst consequences of global warming is rapidly closing, and now the surge of militarization in the slipstream of the war in Ukraine is pushing the fight against climate catastrophe into second place.

3. The failure of neoliberal globalization and the lack of sustainability of capitalism

The ecumenical movement's fundamental critique of neoliberal capitalism has come true. We see that globalization, with its creed of the primacy of the market over politics, has proven to be mistaken. The Covid crisis has exposed the vulnerability and crisis-prone interdependence of global value chains. Faced with the failure of neoliberalism, elites are now calling for a return of the state as an actor in order to be able to preserve capitalism in its basic structure. This new type of state interventionism is supposed to "save" capitalism and become the midwife of a "capitalism with a human face". This completely ignores the fact that the present socio-ecological crisis is fundamentally different from the previous crises of capitalism. Capitalism is stuck in a structural dilemma: What is ecologically desirable – a sustainable economy – generates social dislocations such as mass unemployment and scandalous inequality. And what is socially desirable accelerates ecological crises. However, this socio-ecological dilemma will not be resolved by the

reassertion of a primacy of politics. Therefore, policy-making must break with the maximization of profit and growth, the driving forces of capitalist economic activity.

4. What is imperative is conversion to an economy of life and justice

The elites want to reconcile economy and ecology with a "Green New Deal". Renewable energies are supposed to lead to an environmental policy turnaround and a boost in employment. They promise a "win-win" situation. But this promise is misguided, because green capitalism also needs economic growth – and the climate crisis is the flip side of economic growth. Therefore, the socio-ecological dilemma in capitalism cannot be resolved. What is needed is a radical new approach that combines social and environmental sustainability goals with the politico-economic functionality.

Policy-making must no longer submit to the dictates of the markets, but must press the markets into service. What is needed is a state that provides for health, good work and education, sustainable transport and care for creation, and regulates the economy in such a way that it becomes life-serving. The standard must be life, especially of the poor and of creation:

- Humankind is not the lord and master of nature, but part of creation;
- Money is a public good and must serve the common good alone;
- Priority is to be given to the common purpose of goods over private use, because God created the world for all;
- Good work, health and education are human rights and not commodities.

Urgently needed is a global, socially embedded sustainability revolution to allow for the emergence of an "economy of enough for all". Such a fundamental turnaround, however, is not a win-win situation. It must be fought for in conflict with those who benefit from the prevailing order. The struggle for justice and stewardship of creation is always part of social class conflicts.

5. The new logic of universal brother- and sisterhood: The Earth is the Lord's and all that is in it, the world and those who live in it (Ps 24:1)

The conflict over the imposition of a new world order is reminiscent of the biblical image of the prophet Isaiah, who clothes his message of the people's doom in the metaphor of a crack that, at first barely visible, eats its way further and further into a high wall "like a break in a high wall, bulging out and about to collapse, whose crash comes suddenly, in an instant" (Isa 30:13). The cracks are widening, revealing the consequences of the global climate catastrophe. Hurricanes and flash floods undermine the foundations; droughts and conflagrations destroy life.

SINCE the wall will soon break and bury all life under it,

we realize: This economy desecrates Mother Earth. It forces all life under a system that brings ruin. "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" ("Call to Action for an Economy of Life, Justice and Peace for All" by the WCC of 2012). Our age of mammon is disaster capitalism. It threatens the life of humanity and the planet as a whole.

We affirm that neoliberal globalization, which privatizes the Earth's goods for a minority, violates the principle of universal brother- and sisterhood; all have a right to share the Earth's goods.

NOTING THAT global capitalism is the exploitation of people and destruction of creation that has become a system, and the rich take an outsized share of the goods of this Earth that belongs to all,

we realize: We are all in the same storm, but not in the same boat. It is the rich and the economic and political actors and institutions centrally influenced by them that are largely to blame for the destruction of the Earth, the exploitation of people, and the climate catastrophe. The destructive logic of the dominant order must be overcome.

We affirm that human beings are part of creation and not its masters. We need a new logic, moving from the logic of domination, which threatens life on Earth, to the logic of universal sister- and brotherhood, which includes everyone with whom human beings share life in the house of creation (cf. Gal 3:26-28).

NOTING THAT action must be taken quickly, as tipping points loom and the development will then become uncontrollable and irreversible,

we recognize: In resisting situations that seem hopeless and desperate, the apocalyptic writings of the Bible reveal that disaster is here, but there is hope to defeat the beast. Apocalypse means "to reveal." Because, "Fallen, fallen is Babylon" (Isa 21:9). The beast that wreaks havoc on Earth (Acts 13) is capital. The apocalyptic scriptures reveal that the prevailing system is at its end.

We affirm that disaster does not have the last word. There is hope for a future beyond the catastrophes created by the powerful. The power of the greedy empires will collapse. Another world is possible. We expect a new heaven and a new Earth (Acts 21:1-8). This is not a mere utopia, but a challenge to action, so that the fundamental rights of Mother Earth and of peoples will be respected, arising from the inalienable human dignity of all. The vision of a community that recognizes each person as a brother or sister is an incentive to make it possible.

6. An ecumenism of the churches and all religious communities to overcome our destructive world order

Global capitalism poses a threat "not only to economic life but also to the spiritual life of people, and not only to humanity but also to the whole creation" (WCC Mission Statement). This threat is now being further exacerbated by the war in Ukraine and the resultant dynamics of global arms build-up. It is essential to "desert" the death logic of belligerent violence and dominant capitalism. But this requires a new international legal order with corresponding international institutions and organizations based on the belief in universal brother- and sisterhood.

Pope Francis criticizes in the encyclical "Laudato si'" that humankind feels themselves to be ruler and owner, "entitled to plunder the Earth. We forget that we are part of creation. Our own body is formed from the elements of the planet" (para. 2).

NOTING THAT concern for the common house of creation unites churches and religious communities, **we recognize** that common faith inspires all believers and gives them strength to hear the cry of the poor and of Mother Earth and to treat the Earth more kindly, respectfully and wisely. This spirituality unites the Christian churches with sisters and brothers in Judaism, Islam, Buddhism and many other religions around the world.

We reaffirm our faith in God, the Creator of Heaven and of the desecrated Mother Earth. The churches must read the signs of the times from the perspective of the crucified people and the desecrated creation. They must dare to conflict with the powerful and the plunderers of creation so that all may have life. Therefore, the churches must revitalize the "conciliar process for justice, peace and the integrity of creation" and place it at the center of their activities. In doing so, they must immediately go beyond their church walls and form alliances with the victims and the movements in solidarity with them.

We call upon the WCC Assembly in Karlsruhe to make a covenant against the prevailing world order and to resist decisively in word and deed.

Therefore, we renew past resolutions of the ecumenical movement and emphasize, in harmony with Pope Francis: We need an ecumenism of religions, faith communities and all people to protect Mother Earth and all who inhabit this beautiful planet. Time is running out.

Signatories: ... [if you want to support this call, please send an email to info@kairoseuropa.de]

In view of these dramatic global signs of the times, we will organize a comprehensive program and places of encounter during the WCC Assembly in our "Casa Comun". The events are designed to strengthen our understanding of the prophetic role of the church and committed Christians in addressing the central (survival) issues of justice, peace and integrity of creation. More information can be found at www.casa-comun-2022.de.