



November 2020 Accountability Report

Geneva, 11 December 2020

Introduction: A word from the interim general secretary

As we now begin this Advent season and Christmas, I write to share a few key updates on the status of our work and the time ahead of us.

As we look ahead, it is clear that celebrations of Advent in churches and families this year will be tempered by the physical distancing and other restrictions brought on by our concern to protect each other from the coronavirus. At the same time, violence and war continue, destroying the livelihoods of people with increasing numbers of refugees and migrants, and the killing of many men, women and children. In this context, the birth of Jesus signals for us the dawn of hope for ourselves and our world.

As many of you will know, we have been part of the global campaign the “16 Days against Sexual and Gender-Based Violence,” an annual international campaign that always begins on 25 November, the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women, and ends on 10 December, Human Rights Day. This year, the World Council of Churches is highlighting in particular the links between the household of God and the fundamental need to make our homes safe and loving spaces. You can find more information about this at: [16 Days against Sexual and Gender-Based Violence](#).

Cantonal order in Geneva

On 1 November, the Geneva canton issued an order for all to leave home only when necessary, requiring that work be conducted from home when possible. Working plans were further adapted, and teams reduced to an absolute minimum on site throughout the year.

1. Executive committee online

During its online meeting, 9-13 November, the WCC executive committee addressed vital international developments, approved the plans and budget for 2021 and pledged support for and solidarity with churches across the world at a time of multiple concurrent crises.

The executive committee agreed to meet 15-17 February 2021 to decide on the manner of convening the central committee (see impact of COVID-19 on WCC governance below).

Dr Agnes Abuom, moderator of the WCC central committee, shared her perspective on what inspires the work of the WCC, noting that the world is still in a lethal battle against COVID-19. “It has abruptly disrupted the momentum towards achievement of the development agenda, having triggered the most profound economic and societal crisis the world has seen for the last century,” she said.

The executive committee received documents related to the work of the **Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace** in 2020 and approved plans for 2021 in which the Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace journeys with the churches in North America. The Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace theme for 2021 is racial injustice and solidarity with Indigenous Peoples. Pilgrim team visits will mainly be on-line encounters.

The executive committee approved a **new programmatic initiative on overcoming racism**. Racism in its different expressions has been an ongoing concern of the fellowship of churches, indeed of the whole ecumenical movement. A description of the WCC engagement on racism with ecumenical regional offices was presented, and a detailed plan and budget for the initiative on overcoming racism were approved at the executive committee meeting and will be implemented from 1 January 2021.

The executive committee noted the **impact of COVID-19 on WCC governance**, with concern that the central committee was not able to convene in 2020 due to the pandemic. It recognized that as the pandemic unfolds, it is increasingly unlikely that an in-person meeting in Geneva in June 2021 will be possible. The committee discussed possible scenarios for convening the central committee meeting in light of continuing restrictions on travel and meetings. It discussed how an online meeting might affect decisions on (1) assembly preparations, including confirmation of member church delegations, (2) general business, including proposed revisions to WCC rules, and (3) the process of electing a general secretary. The committee agreed to ask the “working group on constitution and rules,” appointed by the central committee, to develop a proposal for using electronic communication to convene the central committee as provided in Rule XVIII.8. The proposal will be presented to the executive committee in February 2021, where a final decision will be made on the manner of convening the central committee.

The executive committee received and discussed the updated plan and the structure of the **Jerusalem Liaison Office**, addressing the need to consolidate the work of the different WCC initiatives in the Middle East region, to secure their sustainability and to increase the engagement of local churches. Implementation is scheduled for 1 July 2021.

The executive committee received and discussed an updated proposal to establish a **Commission on Health and Healing** after the assembly in 2022. The executive committee recommended that the By-Laws of the Commission on Health and Healing be sent for review by the personnel, staffing and nominations sub-committee at the next regular meeting of the executive committee.

The executive committee approved terms of reference for a **pre-assembly programme evaluation** and nominated an evaluation team. The evaluation will assist the WCC 11th Assembly in its review of programmes undertaken to implement policies adopted by 10th Assembly, i.e., the WCC strategic plan and the Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace.

The executive committee received a report on the current financial situation. Actions have been taken throughout the year to adjust for COVID-19 impacts. Income of CHF 20.3 million is forecast for 2020 for usual activities, and despite losses suffered at Bossey, it is forecast that general reserves may remain steady. Net proceeds from land-shares in the Montreal project (described below, in “update on Green Village”) will improve the WCC’s financial position in 2020, with a forecast net increase in funds and reserves of CHF 9.2 million. Large treasury values will not be on hand as a result; rather, the deficit fund held on WCC’s balance sheet will be reduced, and sales proceeds applied to reduce loans. The balance sheet for 2020 will reflect a healthier financial situation.

The **2021 WCC budget**, apart from building project matters, projects income of CHF 21.9 million and a net draw down of funds and reserves of CHF 2 million. The budget also includes the prospective sale of the Kyoto project, which, despite COVID-19 and delays, is scheduled for conclusion in 2021, with the prospect of net income of approximately CHF 18 million.

The plans and budget for 2021 reflect the hope that international travel and meetings will resume sometime next year, most probably in the second part of the year. With regard to that assumption, and as the situation evolves, monitoring and adaptation of both budgets and plans will be required. The executive committee received the assembly framework budget covering the period 2018 –

2022, with detailed information on sources of funds and expenditure types. The committee discussed risks in the assembly budget due to the postponement of the assembly and uncertainty in how COVID-19 will affect assembly contributions. These risks for 2021 and 2022 need to be monitored carefully, and adjustments may be needed. Work on the assembly budget continues, and the budget 2018-2022 will be brought forward to the next meeting, with a view to its approval by June 2021. This assembly budget framework depends on the success of an application to the German Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

The executive committee acknowledged with sadness and pain the restructuring decisions that have affected staff and activities at the **Bossey hotel and conference centre**, including the temporary closure of the “Barn” in the year 2021. The academic courses will continue as planned.

Further to the recommendations of the steering committee, the executive committee affirmed the strategy for the next phase of the **Green Village** project. The executive committee decided that the strategy would be to sell one land plot, in order to generate capital to invest in the Lima building; and to lease one other land plot, under certain conditions, in order to generate regular income. The executive committee received a transaction process document, as updated following the steering committee meeting in November, setting out the decision points in the Green Village process, and governance responsibilities, over the next year.

Staffing

The executive committee agreed to renew the contracts of any programme or leadership staff whose term limit would expire before the assembly to 31 December 2022. The executive committee agreed to open two positions as of 1 January 2021 – programme executive for overcoming racism and manager for income monitoring and development. The executive committee appointed Mr Douglas L. Chial director of the office of the general secretariat as of 1 January 2021, no longer an interim appointment.

Public statements from the executive committee

Nagorno-Karabakh

The executive committee issued a statement calling for calm and wisdom following six weeks of intense fighting for Nagorno-Karabakh/Artsakh, suspended by an agreement announced among the leaders of Azerbaijan, Armenia, and Russia. Welcoming an end to the bloodshed and destruction, the executive committee appealed for “a lasting peace founded on justice and human rights for the people of Nagorno-Karabakh/Artsakh and the wider region.”

<https://www.oikoumene.org/news/wcc-makes-urgent-call-for-lasting-peace-founded-on-justice-and-human-rights-for-people-of-nagorno-karabakh>

Ethiopia

The executive committee released a statement lifting up in prayer the people and churches of Ethiopia. “The WCC condemns the numerous brutally violent attacks against churches and communities, especially affecting the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church, on the members of any community defined by religion or ethnicity, on churches and holy places, and on civilians by armed groups,” reads the statement. “We mourn the deaths of so many people in recent attacks.”

<https://www.oikoumene.org/news/wcc-urges-return-to-dialogue-rather-than-conflict-in-ethiopia>

For further coverage of the executive committee meeting, see:

[WCC executive committee maps future with hope in uncertain times](#)

[WCC moderator reflects on role of churches during “profound economic and societal crisis”](#)

[WCC executive committee to convene online 9-13 November](#)

2. Solidarity in the crisis: Our work to support the fellowship in the midst of COVID-19

In response to the worldwide spread of the coronavirus and millions of cases of COVID-19, among other related initiatives, the WCC has worked closely with churches and with regional and national councils of churches through the initiatives below:

A joint AACC-WCC delegation visited South Sudan from 16-20 November. The delegation was led by central committee member and All Africa Conference of Churches president Rt Rev. Arnold Temple, and also included Dr Agnes Abuom, moderator of the World Council of Churches central committee. Meeting with South Sudan president Salva Kiir, the delegation encouraged various parties to the conflict to embrace peace and reconciliation, as well as to accompany the country's churches during this difficult period.

All Africa Conference of Churches urges all parties in South Sudan: "embrace peace and reconciliation."

During an intergenerational, international dialogue on Faith in Action for Children Taking Action Together for Children in Response to the COVID-19 Pandemic and Beyond on 19 November, WCC deputy general secretary Prof. Dr Isabel Apawo Phiri spoke on poverty in the context of COVID-19, and how it relates to sustainability, climate change and the use of natural resources.

During COVID-19, faith communities "well-placed to promote concrete solutions" for sustainability.

A 5 November webinar, "People at the Frontlines: The Gift of Life," hosted by the WCC, brought together both firsthand and learned perspectives from a medical doctor who is also clergy and a COVID-19 survivor, a public sanitation worker, and a humanitarian responder.

Frontline workers taking on "sacrificial burden" as COVID-19 spreads.

3. What have we achieved? Key programmatic work this month

Even as WCC staff remain off-site, and despite postponement or cancellation of some meetings and consultations, the important planned activities of WCC programmes and urgent responses to the pandemic situation have gone forward in November. They include, among other activities:

After a two-day workshop in Buea, religious leaders from Cameroon issued a statement saying "that the cost and consequences of the armed conflict in Anglophone Cameroon and the Boko Haram insurgency in the North are becoming increasingly unbearable on the local populations who are paying a high price for these conflicts."

Religious leaders in Cameroon reflect on the cost of the conflict and how to resolve it.

In the continuation of a webinar series organized by the WCC, a two-part online discussion was held on 25 November, during which those involved in bilateral and multilateral dialogue shared their processes, methodologies, results, and reception.

Webinars continue to explore complex relations between multilateral and bilateral ecumenical dialogues

A 24 November webinar unveiled and then unpacked many aspects of "Converting Discipleship: Dissidence and Metanoia," a study paper produced by the World Council of Churches Commission for World Mission and Evangelism.

"Converting Discipleship: Dissidence and Metanoia" paper newly announced during webinar

Celebrating International Children's Day, the WCC has released a research paper, "Cooler Earth - Higher Benefits: Actions by Those Who Care about Children, Climate and Finance." The publication offers suggestions for how churches and other organizations around the world can respond to the climate emergency through investment decisions that are crucial to protect children from global warming.

WCC study supports financial choices in response to the climate crisis

The leadership of the Joint Working Group between the Roman Catholic Church and the World Council of Churches, during an online meeting held 6 November, released a communiqué acknowledging the current unprecedented challenges and mapping the work ahead.

WCC, Roman Catholic joint working group acknowledges “unprecedented challenge for churches worldwide”

4. Organizational development: What did we do internally?

Even though somewhat challenged by the pandemic, WCC leadership and staff have continued to adapt their work arrangements, set about rethinking plans and budgets for the next year, advanced preparations for the upcoming assembly, and worked to support staff in the new circumstances through spiritual resources.

On 25 November, the cantonal labour office work inspectorate (OCIRT), which works closely with the public health department (OFSP) conducted a review of the COVID-19 protection plan, communication campaign and an inspection of working spaces. The inspector confirmed that the protection plan complied with the cantonal orders, and issued no recommendations for amendment.

An all staff meeting took place online on 24 November to present the decisions by the executive committee and an update on the current situation with COVID-19 in Geneva, Bossey, Jerusalem, New York and Nairobi.

5. Update on communication

Restrictions on travel and other activities during this time have sparked a wave of innovation in the WCC communications realm, as new tools and initiatives bring the global ecumenical fellowship together online:

A new Facebook profile frame developed by the WCC is helping people to express visually their support for the campaign “16 Days against Gender-Based Violence.”

New Facebook frame brings momentum to “16 Days against Gender-Based Violence”

After ongoing consultations between church and healthcare leaders from many countries, the World Council of Churches has published an “Ecumenical Global Health COVID-19 Response Framework.”

WCC publishes “Global Health COVID-19 Response Framework”

Our series of interviews with Thursdays in Black ambassadors highlights those who are playing a vital role in increasing the impact of our collective call for a world without rape and violence. One such ambassador is Rev. Michael Blair, general secretary of the General Council for the United Church of Canada. He is also a member of the WCC Commission on World Mission and Evangelism.

Rev. Michael Blair: “Collaborate in the healing and transformation of the world”

6. Update on statements, comments and messages

November witnessed multiple international actions, crises and other developments that called for public statements by the WCC. Below are links to published messages from the WCC to the fellowship and beyond:

In 2020 Christmas message, WCC puts forth “fragile hope” and “sound of angels in the air”

WCC congratulates Dr Audeh Quawas on appointment to Jordanian Senate

[German Protestant church commemorates support for WCC Programme to Combat Racism](https://www.oikoumene.org/news/german-protestant-church-commemorates-support-for-wcc-programme-to-combat-racism(oikoumene.org))
[https://www.oikoumene.org/news/german-protestant-church-commemorates-support-for-wcc-programme-to-combat-racism\(oikoumene.org\)](https://www.oikoumene.org/news/german-protestant-church-commemorates-support-for-wcc-programme-to-combat-racism(oikoumene.org))

[WCC stands behind “Statement on Faith in Action for Children”](#)

[WCC stands behind youth call for action on climate justice](#)

[WCC urges UNESCO to protect religious, cultural monuments in Nagorno-Karabakh/Artsakh](#)

[Thursdays in Black ambassadors: “The resolve to end gender-based violence must remain strong”](#)

[WCC mourns loss of His Holiness Patriarch Irinej, head of Orthodox Church of Serbia](#)

[WCC expresses solidarity with Peruvian people amid political crisis](#)

[Elizabeth Wathuti asks WCC interim general secretary: “What is your message to children and young people?”](#)

[Use of water as weapon of war a direct attack on human rights, says ecumenical water network](#)

[United Church of Christ in Philippines “shows unwavering commitment to standing up for justice and peace”](#)

[WCC sends message of joy to newly enthroned Malankara Mar Thoma metropolitan](#)

[Groups representing 500 million Christians worldwide urge G20 leaders to release countries from onerous debt](#)

[On World Toilet Day, sanitation is “an issue of justice”](#)

[WCC urges “return to dialogue rather than conflict” in Ethiopia](#)

[WCC makes urgent call for “lasting peace founded on justice and human rights” for people of Nagorno-Karabakh](#)

[WCC sends greetings to Hindu partners for festival of Diwali](#)

[WCC congratulates Rita Famos, new president of the Protestant Church in Switzerland](#)

[WCC condemns recent extremist attacks around the world](#)

[WCC congratulates Prof. Leo Heller on advancing human right to water across the world](#)

7. Update on Green Village

By the end of November 46 out of 48 land-shares for apartments in Montreal, the residential building, had been sold. Buyers were identified for the two remaining apartments, and an investor competition continued for the daycare facility, for which a land-share is also to be sold. Net proceeds generated by November totaled CHF 15.6 million, including sales from December 2019. Of this sum, CHF 12 million has been applied to reduce the loan of CHF 24 million drawn in 2012 which secured the pension fund. The target net proceeds for the Montreal project is CHF 17.3 million.

The construction site for the Montreal apartment building is well underway, with the installation of the first crane on 17 November, and the installation of the concrete plant in the same week. To minimize the carbon footprint of Green Village, 50% of the concrete used at this stage will be recycled, from demolished buildings.

The steering committee met on 5 November to consider the strategy for land, for phase 3 of the project. Interested buyers have come forward, for the whole of the Durban project, and for part of the Stockholm project; all are NGOs or international organisations. The steering committee set guidelines for offers which may be brought forward to potential interested parties in the next months. Based on consideration of the market, and review of high-level cash flow plans under different scenarios, the steering committee recommended the strategy of land sale for the Durban project, and land lease for the Stockholm project, subject to specific conditions set out in the steering committee report.

The steering committee concurred with the recommendation from Implenia to adapt the extent of the investor competition for sale of the Kyoto building, in order to seek a sale during 2021, even if the target in lease contracts is not attained.

8. Update on finance

The interim audit took place from 2-6 November, with a focus on an overall review of the control documentation, interviews with responsible executives, transaction testing based on samples, and in-depth review of Green Village transactions.

The finance team worked intensively with the ITFS manager on the new ERP system project in November, completing the analysis phase with the consultant. On 20 November, a report was shared with the leadership group on the extent of customization required for the first phase, and which concerns principally the contributions accounting and reporting workflows, the Bossey interface, and organization of accounting dimensions to facilitate monitoring reports. The standard chart of accounts was revised, and the new system was set up with WCC dimensions, while team members progressed with the preparation of data transfer files. In the final week of November, project work moved to the “test and train” phase, with close focus on purchase invoice processing, and payments, as being the functions first required in January.

9. WCC online productions

As mentioned above, employing online tools and social media has provided the WCC with a wealth of means and occasions for meeting, reflecting, and planning within and beyond the ecumenical fellowship. Below please find links to other referenced published material from November:

[COVID-19 in conflict zones: “a crisis within another crisis”](#)

[Combatting “blatant injustice,” religious communities work to bring safe sanitation to all](#)

[Webinar shows vulnerability of people on the move as COVID-19 pandemic rages on](#)

[Online panel for women leaders will highlight WCC youth voices](#)

[WCC’s Pan African Women of Faith to promote webinar series on justice and peace](#)

I hope you find encouragement in these developments, dear friends, and I thank you for keeping faith with our ecumenical service in the interest of unity, justice, and peace.

With my best wishes for a blessed Advent and Christmas, yours in Christ,

Ioan Sauca

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