

OVERCOMING VIOLENCE

World Council of Churches

CHURCHES SEEKING RECONCILIATION AND PEACE

February 2005, no. 1

Editorial

Dear reader:

The violence of the tsunami was not caused by human power or intervention. It was a natural violence, instantaneous and terrifyingly destructive. In contrast to human caused violence, this one has brought people together. It has demonstrated significant peace-making potential. Violence caused by humans does not have any claim on that potential, except for bringing together one party against the other. Nor does it solicit the kind of response we saw after the tsunami.

There is no explanation of the meaning of natural disaster, but there well is of the meaning of human made violence. It begins with what the prayer of Jesus on the cross expresses: They do not know what they do. That is true of human violence: not knowing what one does, nor understanding what is really going on. Truth is the first victim in war, and it is also a casualty in inter-personal violence. A humanity that spends \$1,000 billion on militarism and does not have one third of the sum available to address the world's most pressing and threatening problems will be said to not know what it is doing. In a world where 24,000 people die every day of hunger - an indirect form of violence by deprivation or negligence, it will be said that the world's community did not know what it was doing. We can learn what is going on, not just facts and figures, but causes and connections. Do we know what we are doing?

In the DOV coordination office we have begun looking more closely at the findings of the World Health Organization in regard to violence and violence prevention. There is crucial information and guidelines for churches committed to address violence. At the same time, collaboration with grassroots networks within the framework of the UN Decade for a Culture of Peace and Non-violence for the Children of the World continues - the DOV calls on us to work collaboratively with all people of good will. Churches and their institutions can be helpful in promoting both the prevention of violence (WHO) and in promoting a culture of peace (UNESCO). And they should do so in cooperation with international, regional and national UN-related agencies as well as other non-church actors.

As we approach the DOV mid-term, the Annual Focus has shifted from the US in 2004 - The Power and Promise of Peace - to Asia in 2005: Building Communities of Peace for All. Let us work collaboratively and in ways that overcome violence, do justice and promote reconciliation. Together, knowing what is going on, grounded in love and motivated by the Spirit, we shall overcome violence.

Hansulrich Gerber
DOV Coordinator

Midterm – Please Fill Out the Enclosed Questionnaire

The Decade to Overcome Violence is approaching its midterm, and we would like feedback on your experience with the DOV over the past four years. We've included a questionnaire in this newsletter, and would really appreciate your willingness to take a few minutes to fill it out and send it back to us. There is also a questionnaire on the DOV website, if this is more convenient for you. We want to open a space to hear about the work you have done in the Decade thus far, with the purpose of giving visibility to your work and sharing your comments with others seeking to overcome violence. Your response will allow us to see the shape the DOV has taken, and give us guidance as we look forward to new and creative initiatives in the second half of the Decade.

DOV Focus on Asia: “Building Communities of Peace for All”



Photo taken by Paul Jeffrey/Action by Churches Together (ACT), March 2003

The 12th General Assembly theme of the Christian Conference of Asia is also the theme of the DOV (Decade to Overcome Violence) Focus on Asia in 2005. When the World Council of Churches, which initiated the DOV, decided to have the 2005 Focus on Asia, CCA staff felt that the theme “Building Communities of Peace for All” also falls under the overall DOV theme, “Churches Seeking Reconciliation and Peace,” but with a clearly Asian slant. The theme reflects a call and commitment to a task and a vision in the context of Asia’s religious and ethnic diversity and ongoing quest for communal harmony. Hence, living in Asia can no longer be romantically conceived of as becoming one community but living together as many diverse communities that are held together by the same vision of peace for all.

Why does CCA speak of communities rather than community? What is the inclusive community that we aspire to have in Asia?

I think it would never be a single or uniform community, or with any one dominant group swallowing or embracing all other groups. Rather, it would be a community of distinct communities whose diverse races, colors, cultures, languages and religions would be valued and celebrated as part of the wellspring of our cultural heritages and spiritual resources. Difference and diversity would no longer be seen as reasons of or used as cover-up for animosities and hostilities between groups of people. Instead, these would be the starting points for real and meaningful dialogue between various groups as each begins to value and respect the other. In this spirit of celebrating diversity, we Asian Christians would no longer see the other as mortal enemy, or as the unsaved doomed for hell, or as the poor heathen to convert. We would instead look at them as brothers, sisters, partners whom God also loves, to whom God has also revealed truths, from whom we can learn about life, living and relating, and in whom we can also find the image of God. Furthermore, an inclusive community of communities in Asia would be a community that works together, with and despite all other differences, towards a more just and peaceful Asia. Together, we would draw strength and build our solidarity using our diverse cultural and spiritual resources for the sake of wholeness and fullness of life for all.

The theme reflects Asia's particular reality of diversity – we can no longer think of uniformity but of pluriformity. Hence, we think in terms of many communities rather than one, yet bound

or linked together with the vision of peace for all. The word 'building' reminds us that action is still needed by these communities and for these communities of peace to truly come about.

In such a vast and plural continent as Asia, the quest for reconciliation and peace is in the midst of various forms of violence – from physical, structural, to personal, inter-personal, communal and subtle forms. The common forms of violence that cut across sub-regions in Asia include economic globalization, religious fundamentalism, ethnic conflicts, massive poverty, injustice and corruption, militarization, human rights violations, discrimination, and gender injustice.

Economic globalization, religious fundamentalism, ethnic conflicts, massive poverty, injustice and corruption, militarization, human rights violations, discrimination, and gender injustice.

In the DOV Focus on Asia, we will need to highlight churches' participation in violence, which takes various forms: theology or doctrines that legitimize violence, silence or passive stance in the face of violence, or outright alliance with the powers-that-be.

More than narrating a list of situations of violence, we would also make this mid-decade focus a time to celebrate efforts in peace building which have been going on in Asia. These may be efforts with or without the label of DOV, initiated within or without the church and the ecumenical movement, but which contribute to the building of communities of peace for all in the region. For the task of peace building is not the monopoly of the church or the ecumenical movement. Indeed it challenges the church and the ecumenical movement to widen its circle of friends and partners, remembering its wide-open call and task – "Have salt in yourselves, and be at peace with one another."

2 Hope S. Antone, Executive Secretary for Faith, Mission and Unity and Coordinator of the DOV Focus on Asia

WCC SALUTES SUDAN'S PEACE AGREEMENT AND PROPOSES STEPS FOR RECONSTRUCTION



Both photos from ACT website by Bjarne Ussing, DanChurchAid/ACT International



Calling it a "significant event in contemporary Africa," World Council of Churches (WCC) general secretary Rev. Dr Samuel Kobia hailed the Comprehensive Peace Agreement signed on 9 January 2005 by the Government of Sudan and the Sudan People's Liberation Army/Sudan People's Liberation Movement (SLPA/SPLM).

In a 17 January letter to the churches and people of Sudan, Kobia also stated that the agreement "brings a new life and a new hope to the people of Sudan" and, hopefully, "will bring a holistic, just and durable peace".

Among a dozen measures suggested as "building blocks for a post-conflict economic recovery and reconstruction programme", the WCC general secretary proposed establishing "a well-equipped and robust international peacekeeping force that is able to investigate reported violations of the agreement and oversee its implementation", as well as to "set up a strong mechanism on the ground that can deter any violations of cease-fire".

Congratulating both signing parties, Kobia expressed WCC praise for "the tenacity and resilience of the ordinary people of Sudan who have suffered much and now are looking forward to durable peace and stability". He also highlighted the contribution of Sudan's churches to the peace process, and the "exemplary leadership" of the Sudan Council of Churches, the New Sudan Council of Churches, and the support of the Sudan Ecumenical Forum.

Recalling that "over the years the ecumenical movement committed major resources and remained engaged in mediation initiatives that have contributed to the signing of the agreement", the letter states that WCC "will continue to accompany and support the Sudanese churches as they keep themselves involved in the implementation and monitoring of the Peace Agreement".

The full text of the letter is available at: <http://www.wcc-coe.org/wcc/what/international/jan05sudanpeace.html>

Resources and Links

- *Roots of Violence* (DVD)
WCC Publications in cooperation with the Council of Danish Churches and DR-TV Denmark
“Where Are You God?” A documentary reflecting Christian and Muslim experiences of civil war in Sierra Leone, sharing their struggles with violence and understandings of God in this time.
tel: +41 22 791 6111
fax: +41 22 798 1346
email: publications@wcc-coe.org
price: CHF 24.50, US\$ 19.50, 15.00 plus postage
Produced in English, French, German, Danish

- *Religion, Power & Violence* (DVD)
Why are religion and power used to promote violence, and how can religion be a source of overcoming violence? An interfaith consultation in June of 2004 explores these questions.
WCC Publications

NEW!

TRANSCEND Peace University

- TPU is an on-line Peace University designed for government and NGO practitioners, policy makers and students at any level working in the fields of peace, conflict transformation, development and global issues.
www.transcend.org/tpu

- Ministerial Formation - January 2005 - No. 104
The church is a voice for those suffering from violence. This collection of essays reflects the churches' efforts to speak out against violence from a variety of contexts, and shares practical suggestions for local ministries. Voices from the Philippines, Nicaragua, Belgium, Myanmar, and Russia.
WCC Publications
email: nn@wcc-coe.org



- *Axis of Peace: Christian Faith in Times of Violence*
What does the Bible teach about war and violence, peace and peacemaking? S. Wesley Ariarajah asks what a faithful Christian response should be in this time of war.
By S. Wesley Ariarajah, 2004
WCC Publications
price: CHF 19.-, US\$ 15.-, £ 8.40, 12.30

- *US DOV Focus*
A resource reflecting on DOV activity in the United States in 2004 will be published soon. Go to <http://www.wcc-usa.org> for more details.

- *Building Peace: Overcoming Violence in Communities*
By Mary Yoder Holsopple, Ruth E. Krall, and Sharon Weaver Pittman
WCC Publications

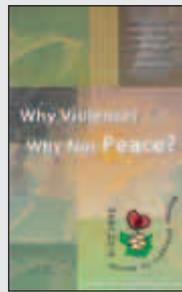
NEW!

- *SMS Against Violence*
During this Lenten season, receive an SMS message daily around the theme “Overcome Violence”.
A joint project of the Catholic and Evangelical Churches of Switzerland
email: ppp@bfa-ppp.ch
website: <http://www.aktion2005.ch/>

- *Latin American Theological Fraternity*
A nonprofit association for women and men committed to the life and mission of the people of God in Latin America.
website: <http://www.fratela.org/index.php>

- *Latin American Council of Churches*
An organization of Churches and Christian movements created to promote the unity of all Christians and of Christians in Latin America.
website: <http://www.clai.org.ec/>

- *U.S. DOV Lenten Guide*
The guide will focus on a Biblical reflection, prayer, educational resources, and current political discussion around weekly topics of Violent Video Games, Violence Against Creation, Violence Against Women and the Violence of Militarism.
Prepared by the US DOV Committee.
website: <http://www.wcc-usa.org>
- *World report on violence and health* (book and web resource)
Prepared by the World Health Organization, 2002.
Download free of charge from http://www5.who.int/violence_injury_prevention/main.cfm?p=0000000117, or order item no. 1150505 from World Health Organization Marketing and Dissemination
tel: +41 22 791 24 76
fax: +41 22 791 48 57
e-mail: bookorders@who.int
price: CHF 30.-, US\$ 27.00. In developing countries CHF 15.00.



- *Why Violence? Why Not Peace? A study guide to help individuals and groups in the churches to reflect and act in the Decade to Overcome Violence (2001-2010): Churches Seeking Reconciliation and Peace* (book and web resource)
By Diana Mavunduse and Simon Oxley, 2002
Download free of charge from www.overcomingviolence.org or order from the DOV Coordination office at WCC
e-mail: publications@wcc-coe.org
price: single copy free of charge;
pack of 25 copies CHF 35.-, US\$ 23.50, £ 15.00, 23.50
Available in English, French, German, Portuguese, and Spanish

- *Affirming human dignity, rights of peoples and the integrity of creation* was the theme of the consultation organised by WCC's Faith and Order in Kigali, Rwanda, in December 2004. Images of the violence that struck Rwanda 10 years ago and their memories accompanied by pain and sorrow as well as by a collective determination to overcome the past for the sake of the future were the context in which some 25 theologians and human rights' activists from many parts of the world gathered to reflect on this theme and the interconnection between its components. Re-membering the victims of violence, Re-weaving the web of life and Re-imagining the place and purpose of the church in a fragmented world, were identified as important ways by which churches can play a decisive role in upholding the sanctity of life - of human beings as well as of the whole creation. The aide memoire of this consultation can be found at: www.overcomingviolence.org
- “Realising mutuality and interdependence in a world of diverse identities” will be the theme of a consultation to take place in Oslo, 27-30 April 2005. This theological consultation organised by the Faith and Order in partnership with the Church of Norway will explore the possibilities for churches to internalise and promote the values of mutuality and interdependence in a world marked by intense struggles for power, resources, identity and justice. About 20 theologians and peace activists from specific contexts known for their violent conflicts will participate in this discussion. The results of this will be made available at www.overcomingviolence.org
- *International Day of Prayer for Peace*
The World Council of Churches will call all churches to observe the International Day of Prayer for Peace September 21, 2005.

DOV Online Services

Receive monthly updates on DOV resources, news and events by signing up @:
<http://onlineservices.wcc-coe.org/>

Mission and Violence



The DOV plenary “Mission and Violence” will be held on the occasion of this year's World Mission and Evangelism Conference, May 9-16 in Athens, Greece. Around the theme “Come, Holy Spirit, heal and reconcile!”, more than 450 persons from around the world will gather to engage in study and dialogue around the topic of Christian mission as reconciliation and healing today.

website: www.mission2005.org

Called to the corner: shooting leads to action in Chicago

Living Water Community Church, in Chicago, Illinois USA, is committed to being a peaceful presence in one of Chicago's violent neighborhoods. The church has purchased an old store there in hope that the Holy Spirit will guide their prayers, efforts to mediate conflict, and nonviolent witness to transform the environment into one of peaceful co-existence.

Read more at:
<http://mennonitemission.net/Resources/News/Story.asp?ID=678>

World Health Organization

Violence prevention a public health priority

"Preventing violence: a public health priority", states the World Health Assembly's Resolution 49.25. The resolution was prompted by the World Health Organization's "World Report on Violence and Health", published in 2002. The report unveils some crucial facts on violence, and lists some frightening figures: An estimated 1.6 million people lost their lives to violence in 2000. About half were suicides, one-third were homicides, and one-fifth were casualties of armed conflict. The WHO offers a typology of violence that is helpful for analysis and in addressing violence in its causes and in working preventively. It lists four types of violence: physical, sexual, psychological and violence as negligence or deprivation. It then suggests differentiation of forms of violence as individual, interpersonal and collective violence. Very helpful are the considerations of risk factors and how they interplay on different levels.

The WHO has launched a Violence Prevention Alliance (VPA) and it works with national health ministries to set up violence prevention programmes. The recommendations that grew out of the 2002 report serve as a basis for this initiative. While the WHO works primarily with member states, the Violence Prevention Alliance is open to non-state parties. In some initial discussions between the WCC/DOV and the WHO violence and injuries prevention office, it was pointed out that churches, especially national church bodies, can be instrumental in encouraging health ministries to consider violence prevention a priority.

Churches themselves can benefit from the analysis offered by the WHO. In this time of increased violence, especially on an interpersonal level, cooperation between churches and civic institutions are critical.

website: www.who.int/violence_injury_prevention/en/

The Decade to Overcome Violence

Learn about additional efforts

The information listed on this page highlights only a few of these efforts; you can find additional events, resources, stories, and initiatives on the new interactive website for the Decade at www.overcomingviolence.org

What are you doing?

Is your church or organization undertaking initiatives towards overcoming violence and seeking reconciliation and peace? If so, please share this information with the DOV Coordination office at the WCC by adding your stories and articles, or information on your events, resources, or projects to our website at www.overcomingviolence.org

This helps the website to become a dynamic space for networking and mutual support and encouragement. If you can not use the website to contribute your information, please send it to the DOV Coordination office using the e-mail or postal address on the back cover of this newsletter.

The Decade to Overcome Violence (2001-2010): Churches seeking reconciliation and peace calls churches, ecumenical organizations and all people of good will – **to work together** at all levels (local, regional, global) with communities, secular movements, people of all living faiths for peace, justice and reconciliation.

It calls us to **walk** with those oppressed by violence, and to **act in solidarity** with those struggling for justice, peace and the integrity of creation.

It calls us to **repent** for our complicity in violence, and to engage in theological reflection to **overcome** the spirit, logic and practice of violence.

As an initiative of the World Council of Churches, the Decade is a global movement. It attempts to strengthen existing peace networks as well as inspire the creation of new ones.

Produced by: DOV Coordination Office

Also available in French, German and Spanish

For further information write to:

Decade to Overcome Violence
World Council of Churches
P.O. Box 2100, 1211 Geneva 2
Switzerland

Tel.: +41 22 791 60 47

Fax: +41 22 791 64 06

E-mail: dov@wcc-coe.org

Website: <http://www.overcomingviolence.org>

Material may be reproduced freely:

please credit the WCC

Photos: WCC / Peter Williams and ACT

Printed in Switzerland

© WCC 2005