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Final Report of the Public Issues Committee

Europe at a crossroads

1. The 12th Assembly of the Conference of European Churches is being held at a time of significant change and vision. Europe has set itself to move from wounds to reconciliation; from hostility to hospitality; from self-centredness to a culture of open doors.
2. For the churches, Europe is not bounded by the present nor by the potential borders of the European Union. Rather, it is an inclusive and diverse fellowship of people stretching from the Atlantic to the Urals, from the North Cape to the Mediterranean and an integral part of the global village in solidarity with all other regions of our world.
3. We hope and pray for a Europe that is a place of peace, justice and truth; where there is respect for the dignity of human life; fruitful exchange between people of different countries and regions, cultures and religions; a place of full plurality where clarity about one's own identity gives strength for openness to influences from outside.
4. The theme of the Assembly is *Jesus Christ Heals and Reconciles – our common witness in Europe*. The healing Christ reminds us of the duty of Christians to care for the healing needs of Europe's population. However, our witness must not be confined to Europe. In the age of globalisation the agenda of the churches cannot be determined by internal European interests alone. CEC and its member churches are called upon to react in face of the negative effects of unbalanced economic forces, financial markets and disintegrating social systems. In the light of Jesus Christ's calling the church shall be led by God's option for the poor. For that reason CEC promoted the ecumenical process "Economy in the service of Life" and will continue to do so. We acknowledge the painful legacy that many countries still bear from Europe's history. An important challenge in today's increasingly uni-polar world is to learn the lessons of the past and to identify appropriate instruments that respond to the disparities in power between the USA and the rest of the world.
5. In outlining a vision for Europe's future we recognise that it is in contrast to the reality of Europe's past, a past scarred by conflicts and misunderstandings, many with their sources in our religious heritage. Religion is frequently blamed for the

world's problems; as religious communities, we declare that we are committed to contributing to a peaceful solution of these problems.

6. Expanding the European Union is a source of hope for many people. In reducing barriers between countries and people, the EU has made a contribution to the peace of the continent. But it is important that this contribution is not negated by the creation of new barriers between member and non-member states. As well as the economic disparities between countries, expectations of cultural assimilation across the continent cause resentment and the danger of new division. It is crucial that an honest process of integration should be encouraged, where each part of the continent can learn from the other. Solidarity and a culture of assistance for those who are in need should remain a key component of the process of European integration.
7. The inter-relations between post-enlightenment humanist understandings of the world and the Christian tradition is crucial in the dialogue among churches and between Churches and governments. It is important to maintain a fruitful dialogue and a process of mutual enrichment between people having different points of view on the foundations of social order and related value systems.
8. People of other faiths are already a part of our European identity. Many of them, such as Jews and Muslims, have lived in European countries for generations. This should not be lost sight of by the churches of Europe who are aware of the fact that Europe is overwhelmingly Christian in faith and culture. Therefore we support efforts to intensify inter-faith dialogue at every level in society. The richness of encounter with people from other faiths and cultures is one of the gifts God is giving us in the world today.
9. In spite of continuing economic progress on the continent, there is a lot of poverty, very often related to increasing unemployment in a number of European countries. Many churches in Europe provide valuable assistance to those suffering and in need and they have a lot to contribute to the alleviation of poverty. But there is also a role for churches in finding a just relationship between the value of solidarity, which has been a core value in Europe, and competition, which is seen as the source of economic progress.
10. Economic progress must not be at the expense of God's creation which is entrusted to us as servant and manager, not as ruler and exploiter. In the Europe of today, extravagant patterns of consumption and production are increasingly the norm, in contrast to the modest life style that this understanding advocates. As Christians, we recognise that our vision for Europe must embrace care for the whole of God's creation and for the generations that will come after us.

Towards an EU Constitution

1. The 12th Assembly of CEC welcomes the outcome of the *EU Convention on the Future of Europe* as an important achievement. The proposed Constitution is an attempt to give the European Union a set of common values and objectives, including freedom, justice, peace, solidarity and civil participation. The inclusion of the EU's Charter of Fundamental Rights into the proposed Constitution makes it evident that Europe is more than a competitive economic space. The fact of

integrating Declaration 11 of the Amsterdam Treaty into the draft constitution guarantees the legal status of the churches according to the law in their member state. The draft text recognises the special identity and contributions of Churches and expresses the Union's commitment to maintain a structured and transparent dialogue with them. This structured dialogue challenges the Churches to contribute to the EU's future development. We commit ourselves as churches to remain engaged in this debate.

2. In the spirit of the Charta Oecumenica, we underline that we are convinced that the spiritual heritage of Christianity constitutes an empowering source of inspiration and enrichment for Europe. On the basis of our Christian faith, we work towards a humane, socially conscious Europe, in which human rights and the basic values of peace, justice, freedom, tolerance, participation and solidarity prevail. We likewise insist on the reverence for life, the value of marriage and the family, the preferential option for the poor, the readiness to forgive, and in all things compassion.

Kosovo

1. Participants in the 12th Assembly of the Conference of European Churches express their deep concern about the sufferings of Serbian and other ethnic communities in Kosovo, as well as the destruction and desecration of churches, monasteries, cemeteries and other objects of historical and cultural heritage.
2. Previously, CEC has condemned violence in the Balkans against women, men and children of different ethnic backgrounds, as well as acts of vandalism directed at churches, mosques, other houses of worship and educational institutions.
3. As churches, we remain committed to promoting reconciliation and healing between the ethnic communities in Kosovo. We urge the international authorities and peacekeeping forces to guarantee the security of all ethnic communities in Kosovo and the preservation of its ancient culture. We call for prayers for lasting peace in this region which can be based only on justice, human dignity and equal opportunities for all ethnic communities.

Protection of Migrants' Rights

1. On Tuesday 1st July, the UN Convention on the Protection of the Rights of all Migrant Workers and Members of their Families comes into force. It provides a necessary basic standard for protecting the human rights of both documented and un-documented migrant workers. Participants in the 12th Assembly of CEC call on all governments in Europe to ratify this convention.
2. Despite the anxieties it raises, migration is a natural phenomenon whose characteristics are continually changing. Migration has shaped European society and continues to contribute to its cultural richness as well as its economic prosperity. Yet migration has been treated primarily as a security problem and responses to it have been demeaning of the rights and the dignity of those who come to us as strangers and as neighbours.
3. Churches in Europe have welcomed legislation that aims to combat racism in their societies but they also call on the governments, people and media in European

countries to welcome the migrants who come within their borders with respect and generosity. This Convention offers an international and legal framework for giving them the protection which is their right.

Indigenous people

1. In view of our venue, on the south brim of the old Nordic territories of the Sami people, we challenge national authorities to secure the rights of their indigenous people in accordance with International Law and the International Labour Organisation Convention 169.
2. We call upon both governments and churches to work for a right distribution of land and water and for reconciliation and healing among different ethnic groups living together in these areas.

The North Sea Sailing

1. Approaching the General Assembly and in the international year of water, the North Sea Sailing: "Protecting the Riches of the Seas" was being held. In line with the recommendations of the sailing seminar, we want to underline that economic justice depends on sustainable management of our environment and we urge that the precautionary principle be exercised and that all radioactive discharges to the sea be ended.
2. We encourage the development of a dialogue between communities of science, business, religion and environmental activists in joint work to analyse, understand and propose solutions to sea pollution, environmental degradation and sustainable harvesting of marine resources.
3. We also call upon the churches to support and care for fishing communities suffering hardships because of decreased catches and legislation limitations. Together, and with Gods grace, we can work to heal a broken world.

The Olympic Truce

1. The 12th Assembly of CEC expressly welcomes the idea for an EKEHEIRIA (Olympic Truce) during the 2004 Olympic Games in Athens as a means of promoting peace in Europe and in the world.
2. The Campaign for the Truce can help to de-emphasise the commercialisation of the Games. It can bring to the fore again the ideals of peaceful competition between young people and make possible encounters among many people of every religion and culture.
3. The Assembly therefore calls on the European churches to take the opportunity during 2004 to promote reconciliation and a culture of peace in their churches and congregations.

The Middle East

1. The Middle East is in the midst of an socio-economic and political crisis, which has led to the impoverishment of hope for literally millions of people. As the UN Development Programme observed in its 2002 Arab Development Report, some sixty million people, or 22 percent of its people, live under the poverty line and a further 15 percent just above it.
2. The Middle East is falling behind the rest of the world. Its inability to integrate into the global economy has produced anger, frustration and alienation contributing to the region's downward spiral into violence and instability. As an Assembly of Churches we find the brokenness of human relations within the Middle East and between the Middle East and the wider world contrary to the reconciling spirit of Christ's love.
3. Despite this despair, the fall of Saddam Hussein's regime and the subsequent steps to re-launch the Middle East Peace Process offer a glimmer of hope for an otherwise troubled region. However, the moves towards a viable and sustainable post conflict settlement in Iraq remain dependent upon developing a genuinely participatory political system, representative and inclusive of Iraq's ethnic and religious groupings. In Israel and Palestine the moves towards a viable two state solution requires all sides to take the steps to educate their people as to the mutual understanding which peace necessitates. We urge all sides to the Israel Palestine conflict to comply with relevant UN Security Council Resolutions, by moving to implement the recommendations set out in the Quartet's (EU, Russia, UN and USA) "road map".
4. The international community needs to encourage further these tentative steps towards peace by promoting the conditions necessary for democratisation, constitutionalism, economic reform and human rights, as an essential part of every state's agenda in the region. European Churches can support these efforts by working through the Middle East Council of Churches and other religious bodies to encourage inter-religious dialogue at all levels of society between the three Abrahamic traditions of the Middle East. Dialogue is an important first step towards reconciliation and the healing of memory, so contributing to the development of civil society, itself an essential component of democratic life.
5. We remain concerned by the declining Christian presence in the Middle East. This demands imaginative ways to stand in solidarity with indigenous Christian communities of the Middle East. As part of this process the Assembly commends to its Member Churches support for the WCC's "Ecumenical Accompaniment Programme for Palestine and Israel".
6. While we show our great appreciation for Cyprus being accepted as a member of the EU, it is our concern that the unification of the island should be facilitated by the withdrawal of occupying forces from it, for the wellbeing of all citizens of Cyprus, and the promotion of peaceful Christian-Islam co-existence.