

Report of the Planning Meeting for Covenanting for Justice Global Gathering Barranquilla, Colombia 13 – 16 January 2009

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Following the decision to have a meeting to prepare and discuss the Covenanting for Justice at the General Council of the (new) World Communion of Reformed Churches in 2010, the preliminary planning meeting was held in Barranquilla Colombia.

The steering-committee of WARC-Europe was invited to participate and asked me to represent WARC-Europe at this meeting.

In addition to checkpoints from the regions - USA, Canada, South Africa and Europe – and the discussion on how churches and social movements are responding to the current situation, the meeting included perspectives from the north and south on how to move forward with the work on empire.

Reports on the Covenanting for Justice process were asked from the regions with following aspects:

- Update on how churches are living out the Accra Confession and challenges for working groups in the churches.
- Analysis of the changes in their respective regions
- Re-contextualization of the Accra Confession in light of the on-going economic, social and political crisis
- Signs of hope Envisioning Covenanting for Justice beyond 2010.
- Methodologies
- Question of partnership with those who seek justice

For WARC-EUROPE there was a report about the current activities from several European Churches and reformed groups - as it was requested in 2007/2008 - and a contribution to the discussion between the Reformed Church in Germany and the Uniting Reformed Church of South Africa: “The concept of empire as a stone of stumbling, aspects of an ecumenical discussion on the theme of empire”.

After the presentation of the regional reports, which are a sign of the very attentive work on this topic - especially by the churches of Canada and South America- the participants discussed their work “on empire”.

It was very evident, that this discussion is going on in the churches of the South, with its own tempered dynamic. After the intensive discussion on the paper “The empire as a stone of stumbling” from Germany between the participants of the North and the South, the discussion about empire pointed out following different positions:

- about the signification of “empire”
- doubt about the acceptability of the term “empire”
- empire as a symbol or metaphor on the one hand (North) and empire as an true and accurate mirror of reality (South) on the other hand
- usage of language

The group discussed the possibility as a start first to discuss without the term of empire – and to take it back at a later time. This might be helpful for people and churches in the North to come into the discussion about the real global circumstances - without a special determination or division in “victims” and “actors”.

At last the participants came to the conviction, that it would be better to retain the term of empire, because of the point of view of the African and Caribbean participants that the waiving would be dictated from the North and this would not be helpful for the further discussion.

After the planning meeting it is proposed to have an event in September 09 with following aims:

- A day or two with meetings side by side – north/north dialogue on empire and south/south dialogue on empire and probably the question what new visions are taking shape and how new levels of south/south cooperation could be realized.
- Bringing people around the table, north and south, in a global dialogue on how to go on with the Accra Confession and the question how the Accra-confession could be re-contextualised in these times, in preparation of the General Council in 2010.
- These discussions are an important contribution to the preparation of the General Council in 2010.