

“I refuse to get used to injustice and violence.”

**Paper of Encouragement from the Decade Conference of the Christinnenrat
(Council of German Women’s Christian Organisations)
Wuerzburg, 24–25 November 2006**

The Ecumenical Council of Churches has proclaimed a decade for 2001–2010 to overcome violence. Christian churches worldwide examine expressions of violence and consider ways of overcoming it. The work is borne by a vision of God’s people in search of justice, peace and the caretaking of His creation. The churches want to make a clear declaration for the kind of peace and non–violence that is founded upon the encouraging message of the Gospel and that will motivate us to establish a culture of peace.¹

Having reached the decade’s halfway point, there have been two important Conferences which have taken place in Germany: Protestant and Catholic women’s and men’s organisations have developed a common gender agenda to overcome violence.² The Conference of the ACK has developed possible suggestions for their program for the next several years.³

Along the lines of this program, the Decade Conference of the Christinnenrat (Council of German Women’s Christian Organisations) has dealt with specific topics towards overcoming violence from a consistent gender perspective and came up with new ideas and proposals. One special feature of the Conference was the stepping of church members beyond their own borders to collaborate with other groups of society in work groups. In these eight groups the participants learned from each other and made plans for further cooperation. The resulting Paper is an appeal for awareness of injustice and violence and for further steps towards overcoming violence.

¹ Report from the Central Committee of the ECC, Genf 1999.

² The Declaration of Heppenheim acts explicitly on the assumption of the gender-perspective and focuses on the social relations: family, partnership, fosterage, age. The special structural relations of violence between the sexes are demonstrated by the examples of trafficking of women, forced prostitution, racism, right-wing extremism and war.

³ The Agenda of Freising, developed in cooperation with ecclesiastical grassroot organisations, places a strong emphasis on the examination of structural violence in economic contexts, in martial conflicts and between the sexes. It demands the rights of people and individuals as well as sustainability and ecological economising. The self-critical question of the guilt of the church in its dealings with other religions is given high priority.

The Conference of the Christinnenrat (Council of German Women's Christian Organisations) is a step of women's ecumenism in Germany towards the process of the third European Ecumenical Meeting 2007 in Sibiu (Romania).

Instead of alone: Together

Violence is not gender neutral. Sexualized violence moulds social relations, labour conditions, politics, economy and culture. The tedious process of uncovering gender specific violence requires cooperation from committed Christian and non Christian organisations alike. Concerted activities like founding shelters for battered women and campaigns against trafficking of women and forced prostitution have already changed our society.

Such common efforts beyond personal borders of church affiliation in the Decade Conference were productive and broadened our horizons. We are in the process of better understanding the background and causes of the structural relationships of violence in connection with gender, which is still a problem worldwide. Working together gives us the hope and the strength to continue denouncing and defying every form of violence against women.

Instead of getting used to it: Waking up

We realise however, that we ourselves have gotten quite used to everyday violence both in private circumstances and beyond. Some achievements have been nullified by economic necessities and political strategies or have been perverted into new disadvantages for women. At the same time, we are forced in our discussions and dealings with women of other cultures, religions and in special circumstances of life to question our own ideas of gender justice. We focus all too easily on violence particularly against "foreign" women – and overlook violence in our own families and neighbourhoods, in our churches. Waking up also means looking closely and deciding: Does our own thinking or behaviour prevent or support violence?

In the process of looking together closely at the situation, the participants of the work groups realised – among other things – that:

- Basic rights of employees are being violated worldwide. We women cite these violations of human rights and denounce them. We trust that alternatives will evolve.
- The ruination of creation is a form of structural violence that is controlled by outward interests and in which we too are involved.
- Every form of discrimination against women within the church is a violation of the body of Christ. Diversity is a treasure and not a cause for fear.
- Fear of contact and prejudices between women of different religions prevent both dialogue at eye level and solidarity.
- When we make ourselves aware of our whiteness, we are on the way to recognising subtle and obvious racism and counteracting it.
- Only appreciated caregivers can give care with appreciation – only unburdened caregivers can give care without causing burden.
- In our efforts we must focus on the victims of women/human trafficking for sexual exploitation, we must establish networks and work together on individual issues despite differences in concepts.
- To overcome domestic violence, it is important to establish networks between church and other social/government organisations and to install services for the people concerned – beyond the borders of countries. The stories of successes that we hear are encouraging and inspiring.

Instead of stopping: Moving on

We refuse to stop at the analysis of violence against women and will not be content with what has already been achieved. Some steps have been taken – in many other areas a change in attitudes has only just begun. The dialogue between men and women, between Muslim and Christian women

towards overcoming violence has just barely started. One thing is certain: We will not lose sight of the goal: a world of gender justice and without violence.

With that in mind, we as participants of the work groups conclude that the following steps, among others, are necessary, and that we will continue to work towards seeing them through:

- We encourage women's groups to adopt any one item of the campaign in their commitment for a fair global economy. We experience and encourage ourselves and each other as a network of women in action, working towards a counterculture of justice.
- The environment is at the core of our housekeeping and economising. We want to counteract the resignation and stagnation that lies in concealing the threats of the ruination of creation. Nor do we ourselves want to remain silent.
- To overcome violence in church structures, we must become aware of such structures, work towards changing those which are unjust, make friends, live out our female spirituality, act ecumenically.
- To achieve a peaceful coexistence among different religions and cultures we need to respect differences, recognise common grounds and initiate concrete interfaith women's projects.
- The way to overcome racism is to exercise public criticism of whiteness as a social norm in language, advertising, song texts, intercessory prayers, and in children's and school books.
- Our organisations should work towards creating an ongoing awareness of the diverse forms of violence in care services. They should support the networking of regional offers for caregivers including creative initiatives of women and men in the parishes to relieve caregivers.
- Women/human trafficking for sexual exploitation is a problem that concerns society as a whole, women and men. Further education campaigns are necessary, both in countries of origin and in target countries, including in our own churches. Every organisation should

join forces with suitable allies to lobby for the political demands of the campaign “Abpfiff” (“final whistle”).

- We, as women, will not take responsibility for male violence but will, together with responsible men, stand up for the process of overcoming domestic violence.

Those women among us who are Christians consider overcoming violence to be part of God’s mission towards a world of peace and justice. Those of us women who have no religious affiliation see ourselves bound together with Christians in a common concern. Regardless of religion or creed we, as women, want to continue our concerted work for a more peaceful, more gender just world.

Wuerzburg, International Day “NO to Violence Against Women” 2006

Participants of the Decade Conference of the Christinnenrat

**More results of the Decade Conference of the Christinnenrat available in:
www.christinnenrat.de**