



# World Council of Churches

General Secretariat

150 route de Ferney, PO Box 2100  
CH-1211 Geneva 2, Switzerland  
Phone: +41 22 791 6111 Fax: +41 22 791 0361  
Email: infowcc@wcc-coe.org www.oikoumene.org

Direct phone: +41 22 791 6285  
Direct e-mail: Beth.Godfrey@wcc-coe.org

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## International Meeting for Peace, 10-12 September 2023 in Berlin Opening Session speech by Rev. Prof. Dr Jerry Pillay, General Secretary, World Council of Churches

Your Eminences,

Ladies and gentlemen, esteemed colleagues, and honoured guests,

We are gathered today in the city that witnessed walls falling down and people coming together as a bold sign of choosing peace. Indeed, it takes courage to choose peace as it often implies taking risks, pushing boundaries, and daring to be different, to be disliked, to be criticized and even to be condemned. In today's complex world, achieving and maintaining peace is perhaps one of the most audacious acts imaginable. Choosing the path of peace when it is easier, and perhaps justifiable, to choose otherwise, is indeed audacious but it is above all our calling and our mission as religious leaders.

We are in the midst of global challenges – climate change, social inequalities, health crises, and ideological divides, wars, conflicts, occupation and destruction. These issues cannot be resolved in isolation, and they certainly cannot be overcome if we choose confrontation over collaboration.

Imagine a world where nations prioritize dialogue over discord, where communities embrace diversity instead of underlining divisions, and where individuals practice compassion and solidarity over judgment and greed. Most religious teachings promote these values at their core; however, we are still struggling today to ensure a life in dignity, security and hope for all.

The 11<sup>th</sup> assembly of the world council of churches met in 2022 under the theme “**Christ's love moves the world to reconciliation and unity**”. You probably agree with me that the theme is in itself a response to the title of our gathering. Audacious peace is inspired by our faith and has two key elements: reconciliation based on justice, and unity that encompasses our differences.

I will mention three aspects of our work that engage with Peace: First one being *education*. We believe indeed that formation serves as a powerful means for promoting peace in our various societies and communities. Engaging young people in constructive activities that foster critical thinking, empathy, and a sense of responsibility contributes to building a more peaceful and harmonious world. With knowledge comes understanding, and with understanding comes the possibility of peace. The **Ecumenical Institute at Bossey** is special and unique in the world and a vital component of the WCC. It is the WCC's international center for encounter, dialogue, and formation. The institute:

(1) is a catalyst in educating and forming younger leaders in interreligious encounter and dialogue

(2) serves as a space for global interreligious dialogue, encounter, and community, and

(3) fosters, both ecumenically and inter-religiously, a critical appreciation of religious traditions so as to encourage their renewal, reform, and mutual cooperation.

In a world marked by conflict, growing social unrest, injustice and violence, religious communities are called to be strong and credible advocates for justice and peace. Interreligious literacy is a key competence for religious leaders to constructively engage with religious and cultural diversity as well as promote respect and understanding. Our programmes equip future leaders with interreligious literacy through holistic learning, connecting reason and compassion, analysis and commitment. In July 2023, together with our partner the Muslim Council of Elders, headed by the Grand Imam Dr. Ahmad el Tayeb here present, we hosted the Emerging Peacemakers forum whereby 50 young people from 24 countries and different religious and cultural backgrounds lived together, learned together and shared together their hopes and their reflections for a better future. These young people sent a message of hope to the world. Together they are a living witness of the audacity of Peace.

The second aspect of our work that I would like to highlight is *Dialogue*. By actively seeking and establishing safe spaces for encounter and dialogue including those with whom we disagree, we believe we chose the right track towards audacious peace. We believe in brave conversations that challenge our perspectives and expand our horizons. Peace does not flourish in an echo chamber; it is born out of dialogue and debate. The WCC is actively engaged in several dialogues: Some are formal and include religious institutions as partners like the Jewish-Christian dialogue, the Muslim-Christian dialogue. Others are diplomatic and include governments, states, civil society and UN agencies. Nevertheless, most importantly the WCC is an active counterpart in the dialogue of life that entails collaboration, cooperation and common acts beyond words and statements for the common good of our human fraternity.

The third aspect is *peacebuilding*. Through education and dialogue, through concrete projects in areas of conflict, we embody the ecumenical movement's commitment to the "things that make for peace" as adopted in a statement of the WCC's 11<sup>th</sup> assembly under the same title. Prophetic truth telling, rejecting polarization and divisions, accompanying churches and communities in situations of conflict are some of the characteristics of our involvement in peace-making. We are actively involved in peace initiatives in many parts of the world, for example, Sudan, South Sudan, Nigeria, Myanmar, West Papua, Colombia, Palestine and Israel, Iraq and Syria and currently in Ukraine and Russia. In the context of racial, ethnic, gender, religious and socio-political violence, we dare to proclaim and demonstrate the audacity of peace. We express such audacity because of our faith, hope and trust in a God who yearns for peace, justice, reconciliation and unity in the world.

In conclusion, let us remember that the audacity of peace is not a passive pursuit. It's an active choice, one that demands courage, resilience, and, above all, hope. Let's be audacious, not just for ourselves but for generations to come. The World needs peace, love, and understanding. Let's embody those teachings with audacity.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Pillay". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first letter 'P' being particularly large and stylized.

Rev. Prof. Dr Jerry Pillay  
General Secretary  
World Council of Churches