

Peace with the earth

Message from the delegates



Peace with the Earth: We as Church people cannot be silent

We, 35 representatives from United Evangelical Mission member churches from Asia, Africa and Germany, from UEM and Bread for the World and Non-Governmental Organisations have witnessed the severe impacts of environmental destruction on all life and the ecosystem going hand in hand with the violation of human rights and loss of cultural and spiritual identity. We call upon Churches to strengthen their commitment in supporting communities who lose their rights and protecting those whose livelihoods are endangered by unsustainable economic lifestyles when land is taken for pure commercial use fuelled by greed and self-enrichment. The immense expansion of environmental destruction has to be stopped as soon as possible to secure the future of the next generation.

We have gathered in Indonesia, in Northern Sumatra from 7th to 13th May 2012 (after a team visit to Papua from 2nd to 6th May 2012) to explore the impacts of climate change and environmental destruction and to find ways for taking action and supporting each other. We have visited UEM member churches in Indonesia: GKI-TP, GKPA, GBKP, GKPS, HKI, GKPI, HKBP and UEM cooperating church GKPPD.

In different areas of Northern Sumatra and Papua we have experienced how people are suffering because of environmental destruction and how they are struggling for their rights. We heard the urgent cry of people support. We became aware of the urgent need to support them. Different teams have visited mining areas in Batang Toru and in Parongil Dairi and have spoken to affected communities; other teams were witnessing the impact of palm oil production in Labuhan Batu and landgrabbing in Merauke/Papua in connection with the mega project MIFEE. A fourth team experienced how traditional trees are cut down as part of a large deforestation programme in the area of Dolok Sanggul for Pulp Production. Finally the fifth team realized how Urban Pollution affects the life of many people, who even make their living from the polluted waste.

We have realized that the livelihood of communities is tightly linked to a healthy surrounding. If natural resources are endangered the wellbeing of people will also be in danger. Human rights and the rights of creation cannot be torn apart. Churches have to rethink their theology to integrate the care for God's creation into their preaching and actions. Only if land, water and air are intact people will be able to live from the resources God has given.

God has given his promise: "The land will give its fruit, and you will have all you want to eat and will live in safety." (Leviticus 25:19) And in the New Testament the redemption of humankind is linked to the redemption of creation: "the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and will obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God." (Romans 8:21)

This insight has found an expression in the final message of the International Ecumenical Peace Convocation of the World Council of Churches in Kingston/Jamaica in May 2011: "Our concern for the Earth and our concern for humanity go hand in hand. Natural resources and common goods such as water must be shared in a just and sustainable manner. We join global civil society in urging governments to reconstruct radically all our economic activities towards the goal of an ecologically sustainable economy."



Having experienced the impact of the enormous threats to environment and people during our visit we see the need that churches strengthen their efforts by word and action, by preaching teaching and advocacy in protecting those communities and individuals whose existence is endangered and who are the most vulnerable members of our communities. The churches are in a particular position to call for the care of the integrity of creation in accordance with the Lord's imperative. We wish the churches be more open for a theology on taking care for the creation, in particular related to issues of climate change and environment.

We see the need to protect people in their longing for a sustainable way of life with a livelihood they have mainly chosen by themselves. We feel a particular challenge for the churches to be sensitive for the grievances and needs of underprivileged and marginalised people in order to offer them counselling and empowerment. To that end, the churches are requested to disseminate the needed knowledge and expertise to the local people in order to make their longing for a life in dignity possible and enhance close cooperation with local, national and international non-governmental organisations.

We call upon churches to set up policies and to establish code of conducts on procedures of receiving donations from private donors, companies and the government so that churches keep their independence and don't lose credibility. We believe that churches cannot accept donations from private or public institutions which contribute to violation of human rights. We wish that the churches expose and oppose the excessive consumption of natural resources.

We also see the eminent need for radical paradigm shift in our global and local economic realities by clear and firm joint action of all states. We appeal to the churches to contribute to a development which contributes to a better quality of life for everybody and to protect the creation. We expect a leadership role of the churches in the advocacy addressing climate change, a safe environment and people's as well as human rights. We wish the churches being part of a larger network of civil society on this endeavour taking the initiative whenever necessary.

We look forward to UN-Conference Rio + 20 in June 2012 with the expectation that time-bound, accountable, and solid commitments are agreed upon, which demonstrate a credible path forward to enable sustainable development that guarantees a life in dignity for everyone, based on human rights, equity, respect for the environment, and sustainable use of natural resources. The churches are requested to show that life on earth is possible without destroying the environment and the planet by their own means and activities. It is not only a matter of credibility but also of stewardship.

We call upon UEM Member Churches to continue the process that has started in 2008 to join efforts in addressing the global challenges of climate change and environmental destruction and we ask the UEM and Bread for the World to further assist churches, faith-based and non-governmental organizations in raising awareness, in sharing experiences and in taking concrete action and doing advocacy work so that "Peace with the Earth" will not just be a slogan but a reality of mission in this world.