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Ecumenical Dialogue on the Former Yugoslavia

World Council of Churches Conference of European Churches

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Documentation

**World Council of Churches
Conference of European Churches**

ECUMENICAL DIALOGUE ON THE FORMER YUGOSLAVIA

Communique

At the invitation of the General Secretaries of the World Council of Churches and the Conference of European Churches, representatives of the Serbian Orthodox Church, the Ecumenical Patriarchate, the Moscow Patriarchate, the Church of Greece, the Evangelical Church of Germany, the Council of Churches for Britain and Ireland, the Church of England, and the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the U.S.A. met in Geneva on November 14, 1994, for dialogue on the role of the ecumenical movement in promoting peace in the territory of the Former Yugoslavia.

The dialogue was open, and marked by new levels of frank exchange on the current situation. Participants recognized that profound differences exist between churches with different histories, experiences of conflict, and theological and societal perspectives. Reference was made to statements issued during the summer by the Serbian Orthodox bishops and to public reactions to them by the churches in Germany and Switzerland.

Participants lamented the serious breakdown in communication which had led to tensions and misunderstandings within the ecumenical fellowship.

These developments had implications well beyond inter-church relations, and had a negative impact on relations between communities both within and beyond the Former Yugoslavia. They had also been exploited at times by particular interests to expand and prolong, rather than to lower and limit the conflict.

Not all the differences were overcome during this brief encounter, but the constructive character of the exchange led participants to reaffirm strongly their intention to remain together within the ecumenical fellowship, out of theological commitments and in order to bear witness together that, in extreme situations like this, dialogue is not only possible, but is the only realistic way to achieve peace and reconciliation.

There was a recognition that no party to the present conflict is without blame, but at the same time, that no single party can be held solely responsible for the tragedy. Equally, representatives of churches outside the Former Yugoslavia recognized that their own and their countries' actions had often contributed to the evolution of the present crisis. Only together, in humility and trusting in God, can the churches hope to contribute to a peaceful solution, participants affirmed.

The meeting concluded with an agreement to continue, strengthen, deepen and widen the dialogue renewed during this meeting. Future dialogues should focus on such issues as relations between church, state, and people; perspectives on history; and means by which Christians might help overcome bondage to history as a contribution to peace and reconciliation among peoples.

Geneva. November 14, 1994.