

Introduction to Open Letter to EKD and WCC

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INTRODUCTION TO OPEN LETTER TO EKD AND WCC

By Katharina Kunter

Even after a year and a half since the beginning of a whole-scale Russian military invasion against Ukraine, those churches not directly affected by the war are still struggling to find a clear stance and position regarding these inhumane events. In the World Council of Churches (WCC), there has been a change in the leadership after the September 2022 Assembly in Karlsruhe. The new South African General Secretary, Jerry Pillay, and the new Moderator of the WCC Central Committee, the German Bishop Heinrich Bedford-Strohm, have sent out the first signals. In a statement--without mentioning Russia by name--on the first anniversary of the massive attack, they formulated a statement that the WCC denounce the ongoing invasion and all of its tragic and unconscionable consequences: "There can be no legitimate political, moral or religious justification for such wholesale destruction of lives, livelihoods and communities. We particularly reject any misuse of theology and religious authority that seeks to justify it." ¹ A month later, on the occasion of their official inaugural visit to Pope Francis, they announced that the WCC wanted to launch a dialogue with the Orthodox churches of both countries, bringing together representatives of Orthodoxy from Ukraine, Russia, and other churches at a round table. ² This round table should take place in May 2023.

While the WCC continues to focus on dialogue with the Moscow Patriarchate, the Conference of European Churches (CEC), which has often been in the shadow of the WCC, is moving in a different direction. CEC is increasingly and more visibly focusing on an "honest" church stocktaking, pushes the involvement of civil society actors, and is supporting political reform processes in Ukraine.³ This is a remarkably different approach from that taken by the WCC.

As Russia continues its brutal war on the Ukrainian people, both will be necessary: The critical stocktaking of past statements and positions of churches and church representatives in the Ukrainian war, as well as the continued critical attention to ecumenical church politics in times of war.

¹ <https://www.oikoumene.org/resources/documents/wcc-statement-on-ukraine-0>

² <https://www.oikoumene.org/news/wcc-roman-catholic-church-underscore-commitment-to-walking-praying-working-together>

³ <https://ceceurope.org/unpacking-peace-cec-webinar-fosters-honest-exchange-about-war-ukraine>