

CEVAA GA (15. – 23.10.2018)

Word of greeting UEM

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General Secretary



First of all I thank GOD that he has granted me to be with you these days.
And thereafter I thank CEVAA for inviting me to this GA.

The Christian and religious intolerance

has been chosen to be the theme of your GA. Indeed there is a demanding need to discuss the phenomenon of religious intolerance from various sides. Exclusiveness and inclusiveness in faith traditions is a challenge for churches in our community today. Please allow me to strengthen the need of discussion on four topics that lead to religious intolerance.

1. Migration as a fact!

Listening to the daily news there is not too much to be heard as “Good News”. On the contrary we are confronted with violence, terrorism, ecological disasters, economic problems, wars, intolerable and unjustifiable exploitation of the people and the earth. These news are accumulating and the result is a growing fear of people against almost everything what seems to be different to what they were used to. The greatest challenge all members of UEM, and I assume CEVAA too, will have to face in the future is the fact of migration as a worldwide phenomenon. Important will be that we make a difference to all the xenophobia that is spreading out even among our parishioners. In many places the fear of foreigner has led to hostility against foreigners with awful violence in words and deeds not in my home country Germany only.

Since decades international mission agencies like CEVAA practice encounters between people of different culture and different faith. Doing this we have gained an outstanding intercultural competence we can and will offer not only to the individual member churches and organizations but to the civil society as well.

Very careful we should use the terminology of “fighting against the causes of migration and flight” what many organizations claim as ultima ratio. But if our fight against poverty, war, violation of human rights is motivated by the challenge of migration we are already victims of a hidden xenophobia because we then agree on a common thinking that migration must be stopped. Our commitment to society is not a result of fighting problems, rather it is the consequent realization of GOD’s call into discipleship and steps forward to HIS kingdom.

2. A call for reconciliation

Members of our organizations, CEVAA and UEM also; have their own history and challenges for reconciling people in their society. Whether we talk about post-war reconciliation or social reconciliation after genocides and reintegrating people in their communities, our member churches have made their own experiences and successful approaches to do so. As Christian we live from receiving reconciliation with GOD through Christ Jesus. We know that there is no peaceful life possible if we are not accepting the chance GOD has given to us. From this experience we are called to offer strategies of reconciliation to the people within our societies who have been or even still are enemies for various reasons. When our relationship toward GOD is renewed then we have the power to reconcile with one another.

Some churches are working in this field with a lot of success. We may learn together with them how we can adopt their approaches in fields that are still not been treated in our own respective churches. Joint programs in the area of reconciliation will be a promising effort in common learning and putting into practice as a follow up.

3. **The sin of greed!**

I am afraid to state that even we as churches must be extremely careful not to become victims of market thinking. An idolatry of materialism has become quite normal in societies. That the Millennium development goals (MDG) have not been reached yet seems to be less important than to save an exploiting economy system that is the reason for failing the MDG's. All over the world politicians and economist are working on free trade agreements that will stabilize the power of those who are already in power. The former general secretary of the World Council of Churches, Rev. Dr. Konrad Raiser, is emphasizing since a few years that instead continuously talking about poverty lines we should talk about a greed line because greed is and has been an enormous contributor to the problems of our societies.

"Since the economic order of capitalism is based on the individualism of the homo oeconomicus and the pursuit of 'rational' self-interest, it not only fosters greed but depends on the unlimited desire of greed."

[(Konrad Raiser, in: <https://www.oikoumene.org/en/resources/documents/wcc-programmes/public-witness-addressing-power-affirming-peace/poverty-wealth-and-ecology/the-report-of-the-greed-line-study-group-of-the-wcc?searchterm=greed+line>, p. 8)

The quotation is taken from the report of the "Greed line study group" of the WCC, published in 2014.]

Sometimes I am afraid that even churches envy one another if one member receives more attention and material grants than the other from the respective mission society. I like to read the bible again under the question of greed as a sin. Was it a form of greed that led Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5:1-11) to hide their wealth?

To be a Christian means to overcome all forms of greed within our faith. But not our faith alone, people of other faith have made the same observation.

4. **Interfaith Dialogue is a substantial part of our outreach!**

It has been discussed many times within the mission agencies. Today we may have realized: Interfaith dialogue is part of our identity and is practiced in many different forms. Dialogue with people of different faith is not an optional extra of our mission we are adding to GOD's call into mission. It is part of mission in all its different forms since we truly believe that without peace and justice among people of different faith there will be no peace at all.

That does not mean that we are looking forward to a compromise in terms of the value of our faith. But we are looking forward to a common commitment of all people for our world. In joint programs we shall ask all participants to contribute time, work, prayers and material participation.

Jesus invites us to act with people of other faith as HE himself did for the better of the world whether for developing a culture of welcoming one another or for working together in projects.

Overall CEVAA and its active work in and among the members can be a role model for overcoming phobias, greed and religious conflicts. As a communion of churches you are serving all people, you are imaging a place of solidarity and not the opposite.

May our GOD bless all your endeavors and your assembly.