

Our Common House – Casa Común

Call for a place of encounter for a prophetic ecumenism on the occasion of the 11th Assembly of the World Council of Churches (WCC) in 2022 in Karlsruhe, Germany

We are a group of ecumenical grassroots initiatives from Germany and have joined forces to critically and constructively accompany this major WCC event next year. It was the WCC that launched the conciliar process of mutual commitment to justice, peace and the integrity of creation (the JPIC process) in 1983.

As a first step, in an open letter¹ signed by prominent ecumenists from all over the world in April 2020, we urged the German churches in particular, but also the WCC and the ecumenical movement as a whole, to (again) take up the survival issues of humanity and creation. This should be done more intensively and decisively and include their structural root causes, we said. The reason was that the ecumenical movement had worked intensively on the prevailing political and economic conditions in the last few decades and had finally taken a clear and almost unanimous position.

For example, at its 10th Assembly, the Lutheran World Federation denounced the prevailing, increasingly totalitarian global economic order as “idolatry” (Winnipeg 2003); the World Alliance of Reformed Churches confessed at its 24th General Assembly: “We believe that the integrity of our faith is at stake if we remain silent or refuse to act in the face of the current system of neoliberal economic globalization” (Accra 2004); and the 10th Assembly of the WCC exposed the “domination of the market” as “a global system of Mammon that protects the unlimited growth of wealth of only the rich and powerful through endless exploitation” (Busan 2013).²

Despite the further aggravation of the crisis of our civilization that has been observed since then, these systematically elaborated resolutions, which are in gratifying consensus with encyclicals and apostolic letters of Pope Francis, are increasingly being pushed aside – all too often probably out of fear of fundamental conflicts with political as well as economic decision-makers.

In view of this unfortunate situation, we invite the ecumenical movement, especially our sisters and brothers in the global South, to take action with us both in the run-up to and during the WCC assembly. For this purpose we want to organize first a “virtual” Casa Común with video conferences, websites etc., and then, during the Karlsruhe assembly, a real meeting place.

We need such a prophetic initiative more urgently than ever because the earth, our common house, is in an increasingly threatened state: the ravages wrought by the world capitalist system have literally taken on epidemic proportions. The distribution of wealth is becoming more and more obscene, (internal) migration has taken on dramatic dimensions worldwide, the climate crises seem to be almost impossible to contain, unlimited wars are increasingly

1 This open letter, acknowledged by the WCC acting general secretary as “constructive criticism”, can be found at https://kairoseuropa.de/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/2021-Open-letter_final.pdf.

2 We also refer here to the current joint ecumenical message “Calling for an Economy of Life in a Time of Pandemic“.

affecting civilian populations, and fewer and fewer people still have confidence in democracy, both nationally and transnationally. Instead, many now rely on authoritarian regimes and structures or on a unilateral retreat into inner spaces – to the delight of the rulers! With the prophet Jeremiah, we could lament aloud: “I looked on the earth, and lo, it was waste and void” (Jer 4:23).

Don't we need to lament like Jeremiah? Courageously speak out the truth? Not fall silent – like the majority of churches and social groups – in the face of the overwhelming power of the prevailing conditions, and not adapt to them? Should we not show solidarity with the many initiatives and movements that also exist worldwide: with the climate justice movement, the women's movement, the insurgents from Santiago de Chile to Rojava, Kurdistan? Shouldn't we, shouldn't the churches, unconditionally stand with those who are fighting for the right to peace, justice, health, and an earth that feeds us and that we respect and care for? Shouldn't we join them in developing signs and practices of prophetic discipleship? Often we are far away from this, often we have become far too bourgeois, sometimes frustrated by the apparent inmutabilities, and submit to the supposed inherent constraints, much preferring to take the small steps that we secretly know are insufficient.

Casa Común – that was the name of an initiative on the fringes of the Roman Catholic Amazon Synod 2019, which offered believers and synod members the opportunity to enter into conversation with one another about life issues. We want to build on this initiative: during the WCC assembly, we too want to create a space where there is room for the spirit of an ecumenism that decisively takes the side of the oppressed in the struggles of this world and fights for a world in which all people can live with dignity and justice.

We would like to invite you all to participate in this Casa Común as a place of encounter, exchange, shared learning and a spirituality of resistance. It is meant to be a place for people who care about a courageous critique of the powers-that-be, who are looking for ways to work for fundamental change and want to unite for this. They may be assembly delegates, Christians from ecumenical grassroots initiatives worldwide, activists from social movements in Germany as well as in the global South, people who care about the spirit of the JPIC process, and all those who want to reflect, discuss and develop plans with us about how and where we can effectively participate in the struggles against injustice and oppression today.

We do not want to anticipate which topics we put on the agenda, with whom we come into conversation and what the days of encounter in our Casa Común will be like. Rather, we want to invite you to a joint working process to discuss and develop all this together. Already in the run-up to the WCC assembly we want to work along language groups in the form of virtual conferences and strategy workshops on questions like: What should be the priority themes for a prophetic ecumenical movement that appropriately addresses the signs of the times? How can we succeed in making our voices heard at the WCC encounter?

We hope for your participation, your creativity, to fill the spirit of ecumenism with new life, together with us – for a life in all its fullness for all (John 10:10)!

Further information on the initiative can be found at www.casa-comun-2022.de - Contact: info@casa-comun-2022.de