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FOR ACTION

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Statement on Moving Towards a Nuclear-free World

The World Council of Churches (WCC) 10th Assembly met in the region where nuclear explosions, accidents and threats have taken their heaviest toll. Living near nuclear power plants, in the target zones of opposing nuclear forces and compromised by both realities, people of conscience and courage in Northeast Asia are questioning the direction of modern civilization. This is the place and the time for the churches to speak out against the world's reliance on nuclear energy and for the urgent need to ensure that nuclear weapons are never used again.

As this region knows more than any other, nuclear weapons inflict suffering that is unspeakable and destruction that is not bound by space or time. If used against their cities, a small fraction of the nuclear arsenals targeting this region would disrupt the global climate, shorten growing seasons worldwide and risk the starvation of a billion people. As the military tragedies of Hiroshima and Nagasaki and the civilian tragedy of Fukushima show that these uses of nuclear energy cause devastating health, humanitarian and environmental damage.

Civilian and military uses of nuclear technology produce large quantities of poisonous materials which do not exist in nature, and are among the world's worst forms of environmental contamination, posing a threat to living things for thousands of years.

Addressing such environmental dangers must challenge the way of living in much of the so-called developed world. The by-products of nuclear energy put an unacceptable burden on our children, their children and the planet. The consumption of electricity from nuclear power today robs future generations of health and forces them to bear the costs of storing nuclear wastes that will be toxic for centuries.

Even in a time of so-called peace, expenditures for nuclear and other armaments increase year by year while expenditures for public goods are reduced and neglected; in many countries there are large government subsidies for nuclear power plants compared with meagre government support for renewable energy technologies

The challenge of phasing out nuclear reactors and eliminating nuclear weapons offers opportunities to strengthen international peace and human security, make business investments socially responsible, and improve energy conservation, renewable energy, sustainable development and public health.

Until nuclear weapons are abolished they will continue to spread; and until nuclear power plants are phased out, their technology and ownership will entail risks of safety, security and nuclear proliferation.

The North East Asian nexus of nuclear dangers

The volatile military-based security on the Korean peninsula serves as a dramatic reminder of the dangers posed by nuclear weapons and associated militarization. Economic competition in the wider region exacerbates these tensions. Regional stability is weakened further by the nature of the competition between the United States and China. In 2011 the United States announced a strategic 'pivot' toward Asia, amplifying suspicions and tensions in the whole region and introducing a provocative dynamic with China. The extensive network of US bases in the western Pacific supports nuclear forces. The pivot increases nuclear threats in a region where all states are already armed with, or dependent on, nuclear weapons.

The US missile defence systems being deployed around the perimeter of China and North Korea deepen regional divisions in Northeast Asia and endanger prospects for the nuclear disarmament the region so urgently needs. These dangers are visible in the construction of a new naval base to service US warships in Gangjeong Village on Jeju, a South Korean island known as the Island of Peace. The base on Jeju will join a web of bases used by the United States military, sharpening tensions in an already tense region. Construction of the base is bringing repressive measures against protesters, destroying neighbourhoods, dividing the local community and its churches, and threatening UNESCO World Heritage environmental sites.

The Fukushima nuclear disaster in Japan has made the dangers of nuclear power particularly clear—radiation, hazardous wastes and contaminated land and water. People have been displaced from their homes and businesses, and saddled with massive financial liabilities. South Korea's 24 nuclear power reactors include the aging and incident-prone Gori Nuclear Power Plant, 25 kilometres from the assembly site in Busan. A 40-day protest by local Christians of fasting and prayer against the plant and nuclear energy accompanied the WCC Assembly.

Threats and costs of nuclear power plants and nuclear weapons

The fate of the victims of Hiroshima and Nagasaki - the *hibakusha* (in Japanese) or *pi-pok-ja* (in Korean), 70,000 of whom were Koreans - is being echoed in the suffering of those poisoned by radiation from nuclear power reactors today. The consequences of nuclear accidents, including Three Mile Island (1979), Chernobyl (1986) and Fukushima (2011), are of such a catastrophic nature for people and the environment that the safety of nuclear-generated energy must itself be called into question.

The health impacts of nuclear radiation, from - nuclear weapons or nuclear reactors, are severe and multi-generational. The dangers of ionizing radiation are acute. Radioactive isotopes released by nuclear power plants may contaminate the air we breathe, the water we drink, and the food we eat. Radiation causes severe individual and social traumas and increases risks of a variety of cancers and genetic damage. These risks have proved themselves to be unmanageable, yet, as incidents, accidents or natural disasters, they must be seen as inevitable.

Based on the research available and the experience of people suffering lifelong consequences from radiation poisoning, we question the compatibility of nuclear power generation and a call to life and peace.

The claim that nuclear power generation is a source of safe, cheap, green and reliable energy must be laid to rest. Climate change must not be used to justify the renaissance of nuclear power. The public subsidies to build nuclear plants and the public assumption of liability for them have distorted nuclear energy's true and very high costs. What is more, there is still no accounting for the future costs of the safe decommissioning of nuclear power plants, nor the long-term safe disposal of radioactive, chemically toxic nuclear waste that must be stored for at least 10,000 years. These unacceptable costs, which our generation is shirking, will be borne by future generations.

Each year nuclear-armed states spend about \$100 billion on their nuclear forces. In the Euro-Atlantic region, current plans for upgrades, renewals and extensions of nuclear weapons systems total \$500 billion or more. Heavy investments provide support for such plans. Some 300 banks, financial institutions and pension funds in 30 countries invest in 27 corporations with nuclear weapons-related contracts. These holdings total \$314 billion, according to a current study. Divestment from nuclear weapons and nuclear energy corporations is an effective remedial action for this state of affairs. It is an ethical choice available to many in the churches.

Towards a biblically grounded, public theology for a post-nuclear age

The norm-building impact of humanitarian bans on chemical weapons, biological weapons, laser weapons, landmines and cluster munitions means there is an urgent need for a similar ban on the world's most destructive devices, nuclear weapons. There are growing majorities among states, civil society groups and religious networks actively supporting a humanitarian ban on nuclear weapons, calling us toward a radical change in the path of our civilization

God the Creator makes all things new. The God of Life liberates all living beings from the destructive regimes of nuclear weapons and nuclear energy production towards life in justice and peace. We must live in ways that protect life instead of putting it at risk—neither living fearfully, defended by nuclear weapons, nor living wastefully, dependent on nuclear energy.

This requires a biblically grounded, public theology for a post-nuclear age. It demands an exodus from the current, unjust and unsustainable models that combine military, political and economic domination and development. It necessitates a pilgrimage toward peace with justice built around communities, nations and economies centered in God's manifold gifts and promises, including the fullness of life.

Spiritual and systemic visions may only be realized over time, yet constructive advances are evident and possible now. When the 9th Assembly of the World Council of Churches in Porto Alegre urged member churches to support and strengthen Nuclear-Weapon-Free Zones, a number of African churches rose to the challenge and assisted directly in the establishment of the Africa Nuclear-Weapon-Free Zone in 2009. Churches have found new partners through the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement which adopted a resolution to eliminate nuclear weapons, and in the advocacy of a humanitarian approach to banning nuclear weapons by human rights, development, disarmament and other religious groups. Churches are finding common ground with governments as the number of states supporting the humanitarian approach increases, from 14 original sponsoring states in early 2012 to 124 in late 2013.

Following the Fukushima disaster, there have been government decisions in Japan, Germany, Switzerland, Spain, Mexico and Taiwan to shut down, phase-out or ban construction of nuclear power plants as well as renewed resolve in other countries to remain non-nuclear.

At the same time there have also been serious set-backs, including the continuing modernization of nuclear arsenals by all nuclear-armed states, their refusal to attend multilateral working groups on making nuclear weapons illegal, and the serious but not surprising breakdown of the non-proliferation regime in the Middle East and Northeast Asia.

The common threat to justice, peace and the integrity of creation from nuclear weapons and nuclear power is, however, becoming clearer to churches. Participants at the International Ecumenical Peace Convocation in 2011 reaffirmed the call for "total nuclear disarmament" and declared that "The nuclear catastrophe of Fukushima has proved once again that we must no longer rely on nuclear power as a source of energy."

Christians and Buddhists in Northeast Asia are leading this way of peace. As one of their many recent manifestos, the *Faith Declaration for a World Free of Nuclear Weapons and Nuclear Energy* of March 2012, stated: "We have enjoyed the sweetness of plentiful energy through nuclear energy; now we must learn the bitterness of closing nuclear reactors and dealing with radioactive waste...[and] liberate ourselves

from the nuclear culture based on greed and consumerism. ...We urgently proclaim the need not for the security of the status quo of nuclear-armed states but for the securing of life for all humanity and creation.”

The 10th Assembly of the World Council of Churches meeting in Busan, Republic of Korea, from 30 October to 8 November 2013, therefore:

Calls on member churches and related ministries and networks to engage in coordinated national actions to:

- A. *Initiate* serious discussions in faith communities about civilian and military uses of nuclear energy and the health, ecological and financial linkages between them, including theological and ethical reflections;
- B. *Enact* plans of action as faith communities including individual and collective changes in lifestyle;
- C. *Advocate* the reallocation of government spending on nuclear weapons and power plants and uranium extraction to renewable energy use, and divestment from businesses and financial institutions that profit from nuclear weapons and nuclear energy;
- D. *Provide* support for rehabilitation and pastoral accompaniment of the victims of nuclear accidents, including the survivors of the on-going Fukushima crisis in Japan;
- E. *Call* on their governments to join the global majority of states in favour of establishing a humanitarian ban on the production, deployment, transfer and use of nuclear weapons, to be achieved by majority vote if necessary;
- F. *Join* civil society and religious groups as an ecumenical network within participatory and open alliances such as the International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons (ICAN);
- G. *Support* specific steps towards the long-standing ecumenical goal of denuclearization of the Korean peninsula, including multilateral security assurances and collective regional security agreements to replace nuclear deterrence and a moratorium on military exercises which increase tensions; and
- H. *Oppose* the expansion of US bases, nuclear forces and missile defences as part of the so-called ‘pivot’ to Asia, and raise awareness of the on-going struggles involved, especially the popular resistance to the construction of a naval base in Gangjeong Village on Jeju island, Republic of Korea.

Calls on member churches, related ministries and networks to engage in coordinated international advocacy with the WCC to:

- A. *Urge* the 28 states that do not have nuclear weapons but depend on the nuclear weapons of another state to actively support the humanitarian ban on nuclear weapons and to negotiate other, collective, non-nuclear security agreements;
- B. *Promote* new nuclear-weapon-free zones, especially in Northeast Asia and the Middle East;
- C. *Urge* governments in countries with nuclear power plants to phase-out nuclear power for energy production and reform overall energy use to increase conservation, reduce carbon emissions and develop renewable energy resources; and
- D. *Consider* coherent, inter-disciplinary actions on these recommendations as contributions to the proposed Ecumenical Pilgrimage for Justice and Peace.