WCC 10th International Assembly Report

Anne Mitchell

I am pleased to report to you on the World Council of Churches (WCC) 10th International Assembly, October 29 to November 8 2013, Busan, Republic of Korea.

BACKGROUND

Over 3000 people attended this Assembly in the second largest city in the Republic of Korea. The Assembly was held in the Busan convention centre and we were accommodated in hotels in the surrounding area. I was in the SeaCloud Hotel where my room overlooked the China Sea – a couple of minutes walk away. Over 500 of us were delegates from about 300 different denominations. I was representing the CYM of the Religious Society of Friends. Two other Friends were also delegates, from FGC and FUM. Several other Quakers participated, representing FGC, FWCC, Australian Quakers and other interdenominational groupings.

The Assembly began with a moving creative musical portrayal of the history of the Korean people. They continue to struggle for a united Korea. There were many learning opportunities to find out more about social justice issues around the world. There were plenaries on different themes; opportunities for ecumenical and interfaith discussions, bible studies, opportunities for worship, opportunities to meet in regions and opportunities for the Quakers to meet with the participants from the other traditional peace churches, as well as business meetings.

Six of us journeyed to Seoul to spend time and worship with the Seoul Quakers. This was a rich experience with sightseeing, meals together, worship together and sharing our stories.

Several Statements were approved by the Assembly including Peace and Reunification of the Korean Peninsula and The Way of Just Peace. As well Minutes on Indigenous Peoples and Climate Justice were also approved. The statements and minutes include several recommendations for action directed to the WCC and to our Governments.

The theme from 2013 until the next International Assembly in eight years time is A Pilgrimage to Justice and Peace.

The message from the 10th Assembly concludes with:

“We intend to move together. Challenged by our experiences in Busan, we challenge all people of goodwill to engage your God-given gifts in transforming actions. This Assembly calls you to join us in pilgrimage.”

I was nominated to serve on the Central Committee which will help guide the work of the WCC until the next International Assembly.

You can get a flavour of the experience from my blog at www.annemitchell.ca and from the WCC website at www.wcc-coe.org.

Please contact me with questions or suggestions and review some specific suggestions for QEW – below.

SPECIFIC RECOMMENDATIONS WITH PARTICULAR RELEVANCE TO QEW

Minute on Climate Justice:

Excerpts from the Minute on Climate Justice include:

“Climate change is today one of the most challenging global threats affecting especially the most
vulnerable. The WCC was among the first to warn about the danger of climate change. Now after 20 years of advocacy, churches have helped bring ecological justice into the international debate on climate.

“The WCC has presented statements to the high level segment of the Conference of Parties (COPs) of the UNFCCC. In recent years churches and specialized ministries have increased their advocacy efforts.

“Despite being a most crucial issue, climate change has lost priority on the public and political agendas.

“The effects of climate change are being experienced now. Churches in countries like Tuvalu, Kiribati, Bangladesh, the Philippines as well as the UN and other international organizations are already addressing the tragedies associated with climate displaced people.

“Victims of climate change are the new face of the poor. ........ When creation is threatened in this way, churches are called to speak out and act as an expression of their commitment to life, justice and peace.

“The 10th Assembly of the WCC...

Reiterates the concerns of the churches over climate change and its adverse effects on the whole of creation and especially on vulnerable communities in many parts of the world;

Encourages member churches to support the role of the WCC in enabling an ecumenical pilgrimage for justice and peace to strengthen links between churches and communities in various parts of the world working together to care for creation and eco-justice; and

Calls upon churches and ecumenical organizations to insist that governments look beyond national interests in order to be responsible towards creation and our common future......”

A Statement on Moving Towards a Nuclear-free World was brought forward to the Assembly in Busan but was not approved. The view was that it lacked the research to back-up the statements; nuclear weapons and nuclear power were included in the same statement; and some delegates questioned how we “would keep the lights on” without nuclear. The statement was sent back to the Public Issues Committee. I don’t know what the procedure is now.

Minute on Indigenous Peoples:

Extracts include:

“The WCC has a longstanding commitment to solidarity with Indigenous People and to promoting their concerns, especially the need to respect and uphold their inherent rights and dignity.

“The WCC...... calls on member churches to:

“respect Indigenous Peoples’ spiritualities and support the aspirations of self determination of indigenous communities around the world;

“reflect upon their own histories and seek greater understanding....;”

“provide assistance to Indigenous Peoples’ delegations to participate in advocacy efforts at the UN;

“support and strengthen the efforts of indigenous communities working to dismantle oppressive laws and policies that legitimize continued colonial practices on their lands;

"recommends that the GS give special attention to Indigenous People’s issues during the next programme period of the WCC."
Statement on the Way to Just Peace:

Extracts include:

“Just peace is a journey into God’s purpose for humanity and all creation…. It is a journey that invites us all to testify with our lives.

“Those who seek a just peace seek the common good....

“Social justice confronts privilege, economic justice confronts wealth, ecological justice confronts consumption, and political justice confronts power itself....

“Together we call

for just peace in the community – so that all may live free from fear

for just peace with earth – so that life is sustained

for just peace in the marketplace – so that all may live with dignity

for just peace among nations – so that human lives are protected.

“Together we commit….. to building cultures of peace in families, the church and society...... to protect human dignity, practice justice in families and communities, transform conflicts without violence and ban all weapons of mass destruction. ...... We commit to turn away from planet-changing patterns of consumption as the engine of economic growth, and refuse to accept that any nation’s security requires the capacity to annihilate other nations or to alleged enemies at will anywhere on earth.

“We recommend that the WCC

“facilitates a programme of reflection and environmental action in member churches and related networks to build sustainable communities and bring about collective reductions in carbon emissions and energy use;

“develops guidelines within the concept of “economies of life” for the right sharing of resources and the prevention of structural violence, establishing useable indicators and benchmarks.

"We recommend that governments

“Adopt by 2015 and begin implementing binding regulations with targets for lowering greenhouse gas emissions consistent with the recommendations in the 2013 report of the IPCC;

“Negotiate and establish a ban on the production, deployment, transfer and use of nuclear weapons....;

“Ensure that all remaining stocks of chemical weapons and cluster bombs are destroyed.......;

“Declare their support for a pre-emptive ban on drones and other robotic weapons systems.......;

“Reallocate national military budgets to humanitarian and development needs, conflict prevention and civilian peace-building initiatives amongst others;

“Ratify and implement the Arms Trade Treaty by 2014.”

QEW could decide to promote and determine actions to promote one or two of the above recommendations.