

We Charge Genocide - Again!
Cry of the Earth's Peoples against the Geopolitics of Empire

STATEMENT

**THE GLOBAL CONSULTATION ON
EMPIRE AND GENOCIDES: WHERE LIES JUSTICE
AND HOPE OF RECOVERY?**

20-24 August 2024, Windhoek, NAMIBIA.

Gathered under the auspices of the Council of Churches of Namibia (CCN), the All Africa Conference of Churches (AACC), the Council for World Mission (CWM), and the World Communion of Reformed Churches (WCRC), we have convened to reflect on the profound issues of Empire and Genocide that confront us today. This global consultation has brought together a diverse assembly of church and ecumenical leaders, traditional authorities, academics, human rights activists, and most importantly, the victims and survivors of genocides and the historical crimes perpetrated by European and US-led corporate and political structures of injustice and oppression. Together we have come from 27 countries, representing academic institutions, and church and religious organizations mainly from the Global South. The consultation was intentionally held in Namibia which was the location of the first genocide of the 20th century in 1904. The notorious medical experiments that were conducted in the Nazi genocide of the Jewish people later were first unleashed on the native peoples here in Namibia. We resist selective application of the crime of genocide by the empire that suits its geopolitical agenda. We uphold that 'Never Again' means not 'never again for my people alone', but 'never again for any people'. We state this at a time that the most reported genocide in our history is unfolding against the Palestinian people in Gaza with the total culpability of the imperial powers.

Genocide continues, and its legacy devastates, unleashed all too often by the multifaceted geopolitics of empire. Jesus of Nazareth, by whom our communities are empowered and inspired, lived among people suffering Roman imperial subjugation. He practiced concrete care for the marginalized and oppressed. He embodied a spirit of radical love and prophetic justice, which brought down upon him the torturous death by crucifixion that Rome reserved for those it deemed a political threat. We name as "crucified peoples" all those who face geopolitical systems of empire that force upon them similarly cruel death, and the torturous conditions of massacre, starvation, displacement, economic exploitation, and, in the extreme, genocide which means annihilation in part or in whole as a people. "Crucified peoples" are those who both suffer and resist these brutalities of empire. They embody both despair and hope.

Our Purpose: Witnessing Resistance among Crucified Peoples

The motivating purpose of the conference was to witness the resistance of the crucified, the impoverished, women, young people and children in their steadfast refusal to be erased and annihilated. Our statement arises from the cry of the earth's people against the geopolitics of empire, the way empire continues to unleash "necropolitics" (i.e. a politics, practice and even celebration of death).

As we met, we were overcome by the urgency of the ongoing genocide in Palestine (Gaza and the ongoing ethnic cleansing in the West Bank). Over 40,000 have now been slaughtered in Gaza by the US-armed and backed Israeli state, with more than 90,000 maimed and wounded. The total dead by disease and starvation has been estimated at over 160,000. However, we also bear the urgency of the invisibility and lack of recognition of the ongoing genocides in Myanmar - of the Rohingya, DRC-Congo, West Papua and Sudan among others and the ongoing consequences persisting legacy of genocide in occupied Tamil Eelam, Namibia, Turtle Island (North America), and of the Indigenous and black peoples of Abya Yala (Latin America).

We were moved by the reality of the genocide of the Nama and Herero peoples in Namibia that began in 1904, and who continue to resist and demand reparations against the settler colonialism of the Germans (German Namibians make up 2 per cent of Namibia's 3.1 million population but own about 70 per cent of the country's land).

The context forced us to ask the question, what role have the church, ecumenical partners, and other religions played, and can continue to play, in finding justice for the crucified peoples in the processes of genocide settings? How must the church stand with the crucified and commit to stopping the ongoing genocides and dismantling the unjust world order that fomenters them? To urgently transform empire and its structures and systems of necropolitics and put in place measures to detect and prevent potential genocides?

The enduring reality of genocides, whether in our distant or recent past, has highlighted the often- complicit silence of religious institutions and the urgent need for a renewed commitment to justice. This entails overcoming the death-promoting policy of a globalized and militarized capitalism, which systematically protects the interests of a transnational corporate class of elite power. This elite power deploys repressive supremacies and ideologies, and with grief and rage we note that these are often justified biblically and religiously.

Even as we must name our complicity and challenge the churches, we must also join with the other religions and spiritualities to charge the empire itself, and its supporters from any religion. We have learned to see through the imperial project and its pretensions. Empire's geopolitics has included the masking of its genocides and mass atrocities, its political and economic exploitations, behind claims to be bringing "civilization," "development," "democracy," "human rights", "freedom", and even "salvation". We have heard the cries of the earth's peoples against these dehumanizing geopolitical pretensions and the peoples' unceasing hope for a just world.

Our Method: The Perspectives of the Crucified.

We recognize that the only way to overcome this death-dealing reality is from the perspectives of the crucified peoples—the community of victims, survivors, and oppressed—both the diaspora and those who remain in their land. A persistent hearing of the cries and analyses of crucified peoples became our "method." This consultation aimed to ensure that our actions and strategies are led by those deeply informed by their suffering, experiences, needs, and aspirations as the subjects of restoration, justice, and transformation.

The presentations and discussions demonstrated the understanding that genocide is embedded in and is perpetuated by geopolitics of empire driven by the most recent forms of 21st-century capitalism. Genocide is a social process of destruction of peoples, including but beyond mass killings; it involves displacement, theft of land, extraction of natural resources, cultural destruction, intergenerational trauma and epistemicide (the eradication of our ways of knowledge), stigmatization, dehumanization, social and economic exclusion. It is not only the systematic extermination of a people in whole or in part it is also the imposition of the oppressor's identity on the oppressed. The world order imposes a system of global apartheid; dominated by death-promoting policy, this system is the expression of violent domination imbued with the power to control by deciding who can live and who must die. Disproportionately, those who "can live" are the beneficiaries of white racism and its other ethno-religious versions, and those who "must die" are viewed as the racialized "others," particularly women among them.

Through the eyes of the victims, we see how the framework of international law has bolstered the necropolitics of empire. We lift up the rights of resistance and self-determination enshrined within international law with all its flaws and pledge to struggle for the full and equal application of those rights.

Our Framing: A Geopolitics of Omnicide

Empire is a giant omnicidal machine that devours people, the earth and the future for the sake of profit, power and dominance of the few at the cost of the lives of many. The “omnicidal” character of the imperial machine is why we refer to the “geopolitics of empire.” Within the context of a death-dealing capitalistic economic system, profit-making and wealth accumulation lie at the very heart of the empire. Whether this is emergent through colonialism, settler colonialism, racialized capitalism or neo-liberal economic systems, it is the logic of power, supremacy and capital accumulation that has driven modern genocides.

Empire’s geopolitical designs include its own necro-theology that resonates with and reinforces genocidal necropolitics. It, too, operates in the geopolitics of our time. This necro-theology demands that everything, particularly life, be laid at the altar of profit-making. This is done through a fusion of economic, political, military, and theological power for the sake of the interests and profits of the few.

Genocide is not to be reduced to its legal definition but is a complex aggregate cumulative and often a gradual social process. It is usually the result of processes of exclusion, marginalization and impoverishment that make certain human groups considered dispensable and, therefore, killable. Presentations on Zimbabwe, Ethiopia, the Congo, Rwanda, West Papua, Myanmar, Brazil, Mexico and Puerto Rico, and others, all showed the limitation of the strict legal definitions of genocide, which can make invisible the destruction of people from land theft, impoverishment and displacement. We resist narrow definitions of genocide that suit imperial geopolitics. We focus on the collective experiences of the crucified peoples rather than the intentions of the imperial powers and assert the peoples’ right to exist.

We recognize that empire and genocides come with cruel consequences that have devastating effects on the victims and survivors. These are not only physical but also emotional, and mental, social, and spiritual and serve to break down the life-sustaining economic and cultural practices of those who have been brutalized.

Our Burden: The Role of Bible, Theology and Church

We especially confronted the role of theology, religion and the Bible in justifying and promoting empire and the genocide that is its poisoned fruit. We name and reject state theologies that promote and sacralize genocide. We recognize the church theologies that seek to focus on love, justice, peace and reconciliation but fall short in standing with “the crucified” in the dismantling of systems, structures and ideologies of oppression and death. We commit ourselves to embrace prophetic theology and praxis rooted in liberation and centred on the ethic of justice and life for all (John 10:10). Put simply, the Bible has texts that are genocidal, promote genocidal ideologies, and describe genocide. We recognize that the Bible has been used in modern-day genocides, including but not limited to the Nama & Herero genocides, colonial genocides in the Americas/Turtle Island/ Abya Yala, and in Rwanda (e.g. deploying a “Hamitic Hypothesis”). We recognise that the Bible is both a tool of empire and a source of inspiration toward liberation. We call for a liberating hermeneutic of religious texts.

Religion has always played a role in the justification of imperial necropolitics. We expose and denounce all religious justification of empire and genocide specifically but not in any way limited to the Christian church.

We, therefore, recognize that there is church complicity in the initiation and perpetuation of genocide, both in the past as well as in the present. Therefore, we call on the church to recognize, repent, restore, make reparations and reconcile for its sins, standing at all times with the crucified. We further recognize that the church is not always best placed to work for reparations, rebuilding and reconciliation. The complicity of the church has also compromised its ability to be a healing community.

Moreover, we encourage all other religions and spiritualities, of whatever nation and people, to examine its religious texts and traditions for the ways they can also be complicit with genocide, to reinforce genocide rather than to resist it. We therefore commit ourselves to deepening inter-religious anti-imperial alliances for life and call on all religious communities to join with us in common religious action for liberation and justice in solidarity with the crucified.

Our Calls

The call for justice based on the ethic of life for all extends to and embraces the plight of our planet, which imperils the life of the whole earth community.

We call on the international community and all peoples of faith, particularly the church communities who prophetically convened us, to urgently bend all advocacy and political efforts to stand with the community of the crucified in their struggle for self-determination, healing, restoration, reparation and justice. We ask them to renounce genocidal theologies and biblical interpretations of empire and struggle to dismantle the death-dealing globalized capitalist economic system.

All participants have committed themselves to common action and to work to create on going mechanisms for advocacy and transformative justice against empire and genocide, specifically:

- 1) We commit to accompany the affected communities and churches in the building of unity in their pursuit of justice and reparations for the genocide in Namibia faced with German refusal to assume responsibility for the genocide, according to international standards and norms. We call on the AACC, CWM and WCRC to join with us in these efforts.
- 2) We request that this declaration be transmitted with immediate effect to the international ecumenical community, including the Church World Communions, the WCC, the German churches, the REOs, and the Vatican, with the explicit call for solidarity with liberating prophetic action with the community of the crucified.
- 3) We commit ourselves to find ways to convene a meeting with representatives of the churches and affected communities, including the diaspora, in all contexts of ongoing genocides to promote the unity of actions of the communities of the crucified and urge AACC, CWM and WCRC to join with us in this effort.
- 4) We call on the Christian World Communions and their member churches to reinvigorate theological reflections on genocide, to emphasize its incompatibility with the Christian faith. This needs to be made a part of theological education, and then faithfully woven into our liturgies and faith practices.

We call on the Churches to recognize the ongoing genocide in Palestine, emphasizing that this has emerged out of a legacy of occupation, settler colonialism and apartheid. We further call on the churches to repent of Christian Zionism, which we name as a gross misinterpretation and misunderstanding of both Bible and theology. We further call for political and economic solidarity with those who are being

crucified in Palestine. In keeping with the ICJ's determination of the state of Israel in apartheid illegal occupation, ethnic cleansing, and "plausible genocide," we call on the church community to act consequently, calling all UN member states to end all diplomatic and economic relations with Israel until all findings of the ICJ are complied with.

We commit ourselves to participating in the global BDS movement and to mobilize our churches, organizations and institutions to do the same.

We call on the Churches and Church Institutions of the West to receive, read and respond with justice and repentance to Kairos Palestine, "A call for Repentance - An Open Letter from Palestinian Christians to Western Church leaders and theologians.

5) We call on the ecumenical community to join forces with those who are pursuing alternatives to global capitalism and the furthering of the principles and goals of the NIFEA (New International Financial and Economic Architecture) processes to dismantle the military-industrial complex and create economies of life beyond empire.

6) We call on UN and international courts to ensure that international law adopts parameters to guarantee that legal responses to genocide are also future-oriented and justice seeking.

7) We commit ourselves to creating concrete mechanisms for accompanying churches and affected communities of the crucified during the genocide and struggles for self-determination. This should include training and supporting a rapid response team that strengthens the pastoral, political, and advocacy actions of churches against genocide in solidarity with those crucified by empire and its allies. We recognize the necessity and priority of victims/survivors directly participating in such mechanisms. We urge the AACC, CWM and WCRC to work with us in this effort.

8) We urge that follow-up actions to this conference be planned to increase the full participation of women and young people.

9) In all follow-up actions, we call for the building and strengthening of our inter-religious alliances, including with indigenous and traditional spiritualities.

The call is clear. We know what is required of us: to do justice, love, and walk with the God of Life.

-Participants of the Consultation

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