

Istanbul Declaration on Ending Genocide, Ecocide and Mass Atrocities

We, participants in the conference organised by the Council for World Mission (CWM), the World Communion of Reformed Churches (WCRC), and the All Africa Conference of Churches (AACC), on Ending Genocide, Ecocide and Mass Murders, were moved by the cries of people and lands worldwide, by the pressing need to end the ongoing genocide in Palestine, the mass atrocities in Sudan, and by the silenced genocides, ecocides, and mass murders that continue to desecrate life. We reject the selective use of the term “genocide.” *Never again* must not mean never again for one people alone; it must mean never again for all peoples, all lands, all the time.

We, gathered in Istanbul as a continuation of the Namibia meeting on *Empire and Genocides: Where Lies Justice and Hope of Recovery?* (August 2024). The statement can be found [here](#).

Both statements took place while the genocidal process in Palestine was on-going and exposed the global hegemony of the US and its European Allies.

Our Convictions

We recognise our one shared humanity and this one planet that we call home with all of God’s creation. We understand that our shared humanity and our shared home bind us to one another: no one is free until everyone is free.

We recognise that the web of relationships we share with all of life has been distorted and destroyed by empire, colonialism, and capitalism. Omnicide, the cannibalising of all of life, is integral to the mechanics of this interlocking system of death-dealing empire. We recognise that at the heart of genocide, ecocide, and mass murder lie the necro-politics of empire. We acknowledge the role of theology in propagating the belief in a god of death and repent the continued misuse of religious texts to harm and divide.

Yet, we also recognise the continued resistance of our peoples who proclaim their faith in the God of life in whatever way this faith is articulated – from Palestine to Sudan, from Guatemala to Tamil Eelam, from the Nama and Ovaherero peoples to occupied French Polynesia, we shared stories of our people’s relentless resistance. Our cultures, our memories and our determination to live and resist oppression, and to bear continued witness to the possibility of another world being birthed. This is what we mean by faith; faith that hopes for justice and liberation. Faith that does not hope for justice serves the empire and is idolatrous.

Naming the Crimes

We are distraught by the dominant definitions of the term genocide and its selective applications; we recognise that there are many other examples of genocide and mass murder occurring in the world. As we gathered we discerned three faces of mass violence in our time:

- **Genocide** – the annihilation of a people in whole or in part by destroying the foundations of their collective existence.

- **Ecocide** – the destruction of ecosystems that sustain life and guarantee its continuity, rendering lands and communities uninhabitable.
- **Mass murders** – atrocities that may not meet the imperial definitions of genocide but that devastate human lives and violate the sacredness of life.

We recognise a confluence and connections between the various tactics of empire and how oppressive forces from all over the world work together and learn from each other, controlling peoples and lands. We particularly see this in the exchange of military technology, training and knowledge which day by day maximises the destruction of peoples and lands. We recognise and denounce the use of rape in genocide and the devastating impact of the military-industrial-patriarchal complex.

Our Resistance

We commit ourselves to strategies of resistance that are both local and global, distinct and interconnected. Our resistance is rooted in faith. We believe in the sacredness of life. The crucified Christ reveals a God who sides with the oppressed, not with empire. On the cross, we see the selfless love of God who does not give up the struggle against empire and announces transgressive justice to the crucified peoples. We are called to join this journey of the cross.

We recognize that our faith calls us into discerning the signs of the times and naming the demons of our age. We are called to speak truth to power and truth to the oppressed. We recognize the agency of the oppressed in the myriad ways in which resistance takes place. We condemn their and our criminalisation by the powers that be. Resistance is not a crime, but their birthright. To exist is to resist. Without resistance to oppression we cease to be human. We recognize the need for global solidarity among the afflicted and denounce that occupation, exploitation, and destruction are crimes.

We call upon churches, faith communities, peoples' movements, and all people of conscience to:

1. Refuse the selective recognition of genocides and affirm the dignity of all peoples and lands.
2. To move beyond solidarity with the crucified to following the crucified as they lead us in the power of the holy spiritual to a world without empire
3. Build coordinated strategies of resistance across borders, linking struggles and strengthening resilience.
4. Decolonise our hearts, minds, and institutions, breaking with imperial theologies/religious ideologies and practices.
5. Defend the sanctity of life against genocide, ecocide, and mass murder, advancing a prophetic horizon of justice and peace.

6. To seek partnerships with people of all faiths, social movements and like-minded organisations for the sake of liberation.
7. To a commitment to justice for Palestine, its self-determination and liberation
8. To accompany
 - a. Pacific nations around nuclear reparations,
 - b. West Papuans in their continuing struggle for justice
 - c. Nama and Ovaherero people in their struggle for reparation.
 - d. Eelam Tamils in their struggle for self-determination and justice.
 - e. The struggle for justice in Rwanda
 - f. The survivors of horrific atrocities in Sudan
 - g. The resistance against continued exploitation of Indigenous lands in Guatemala

We recognize that there are many other situations of genocide, ecocide and mass murder in the world that needs naming and solidarity with the survivors of these mass atrocities.

Conclusion

We declare that empire will not have the last word. The struggles of peoples for dignity and freedom are sacred. Every act of resistance is a step toward a horizon of liberation. We will walk together until that horizon comes into view.

Never again for one people alone. Never again for any people.

We remember the people of Gaza, whose homes and lives are shattered by relentless Zionist violence, where children are killed under siege.

We hold the cries of West Papua, longing for freedom and an end to oppression.

We mourn with the Tamil Eelam people, where mass graves and silenced grief still cries out from the land longing for justice.

We remember the suffering in French Polynesia, scarred by nuclear wounds that poisoned the land and body alike, for the loss of culture and life through colonial dominance.

*We lift up the survivors in Guatemala, scarred by state violence, where
land bears the echoes of genocidal fire.*

*We honour the Nama and Ovaherero people, who have endured a brutal colonial
genocide that demands justice and recognition.*

*We weep for Sudan, where war, famine and displacement continue to crush
people.*

*Grant us courage, not to turn away from these wounds,
But stand in solidarity to name and to remember those erased
to speak with the silenced, to stand with the powerless
and to struggle for a future rooted in dignity, justice and peace.*

*Learn to do good; seek justice, correct oppression; bring justice to the
fatherless, plead the widow's cause. (Isaiah 1:17).*

Amen.

**This statement has been collectively affirmed by the participants of the conference and is
issued jointly by the Council for World Mission (CWM), the World Communion of
Reformed Churches (WCRC), and the All Africa Conference of Churches (AACC).**