



**Churches' Commission for Migrants in Europe**

Commission des Eglises auprès des Migrants en Europe

Kommission der Kirchen für Migranten in Europa

## **"Racial Violence - what can churches do against it?"**

**19-22 September 2002, Ede (Netherlands)**

**Round-Table organised by the CCME<sup>1</sup> Working Group against Racism and Discrimination in collaboration with the Conference of European Churches (CEC) hosted by Samen Op Weg Kerken, Netherlands**

### **REPORT AND PROPOSALS FOR ACTIONS BY CHURCHES**

**The Round Table brought together 28 representatives from CCME and CEC member churches and organisations from 14 countries. In four thematic workshops the participants looked into the way churches can follow-up the World Conference against Racism (Durban 2001) and thus also contribute to the World Conference of Churches' Decade to Overcome Violence. They developed strategies of actions against and prevention of racial violence for churches at local, national and European levels.**

The discussions took account of the fact that churches operate in different contexts and at different speeds in their efforts to address racism. Therefore their needs and capacities to act differ. It was recognized that in spite of this all churches and congregations have the responsibility to find ways of implementing the following proposals for action.

Theological reflection started with some specific statements of affirmation which were brought to the round table conference that:

Racism is a sin

We must learn to speak the truth

We must not use the Bible as a recipe book

We must not condemn people, but their racist behaviour

White and black people, whether migrant people or not, are equal partners

Anti-racist work is "work of love"

All people are created in the image of God. This was the basis on which the Roundtable made its proposals. The Roundtable worked on the story of discrimination and persecution of the Jewish people in Egypt (Exodus 1). It also worked on the story of the Samaritan where Jesus turned the negative image of foreigners into a positive one (Luke 10).

Rev. Pauline Kimba said that theology was a language about the liberating character of God's presence in Jesus Christ. However, as Christians and as the Body of Christ we must accept that we are unable to reflect theologically from the same experience. White Christians have a different experience from black Christians, regardless of their denominational background or Church traditions.

In his opening address to the Round Table, Colin Prescod, of the Institute of Race Relations, London, said, "Within the churches there is little knowledge about racism being a key element of western culture. It is an issue which is painful to address because it is so deeply rooted in the way people are brought up within it." He emphasised that each white westerner grows up with a sense of being superior and that this is a message being communicated through education, stories and media. Kanyana Mutombo, a freelance journalist from Switzerland echoed this and said "People working in the media are also imbibed of this attitude. Thus, they perpetuate it in stereotyping others".

Both speakers said that racism has structured the world's power relationships for centuries. Colin Prescod pointed out that this has been the basis for colonialism, slavery and imperialism. Today we still witness the dominance of a culture of violence world over. After September 11, 2001 the dominant politics is using a language and a crusade attitude that feeds into everyday racism. This manifests itself in an alarming increase of racial attacks. This is also seen in the way suffering is portrayed in media reports on human catastrophes occurring in different parts of the world. For example, openly showing dying people in Africa, but covered bodies in New York touches on the hierarchical understanding of human dignity.

The use of pictures on church aid-agencies materials showing black and migrant people suffering can contribute to negative public opinion of them. This can be avoided by the use of positive images of them and their cultures. Kanyana Mutombo challenged the churches when he referred to them as part of the media that needs to change in critically rethinking their own prejudices and cultural presuppositions.

Inger Nesvag, a Trainer in Dialogue and Diversity Programmes in Norway quoted Dr Martin Luther King saying "Ignorance is not as far from the truth as prejudices". She concluded that we could get through to the prejudices and overcome them. This is the educational challenge set before the churches. Inger Nesvag proposed to tackle this task by developing educational tools that allow for true dialogue and for participatory learning methods. The participants got the chance to experience this through role-play.

Annemarie Dupré, Vice-Moderator of CCME from the Refugee and Migrants Service of the Federation of Evangelical Churches in Italy picked up the same theme and insisted on openness for personal encounters. She strongly emphasised the fact that migration is normal and is an integral part of human history. Thus churches should work against the marginalisation and criminalisation of migration. Instead of elaborating defensive measures against it they should rather raise the awareness of the normality and legitimacy of its diverse situations.

She said she was aware of the tragedy of forced migration as a consequence of existential economic struggles and of violent conflicts and wars. Immigration measures should take into consideration the different individual personal motivations and situations of migrants. This deep pastoral approach challenges the churches at the very heart of their mission in society. In practice, she warned against approaching migrants as victims instead of as actors of their own biography. Theological reflection reminds us that in following Christ Christians are always on the move and thus are migrants themselves. She went on to say that the Christian engagement in migration and anti-racist work is a "work of love".

Vera Egenberger, Director of the European Network Against Racism (ENAR), Belgium outlined some of the most recently adopted European Union legal measures. She cited Article 13 of the Amsterdam Treaty and the "Race" Directive<sup>2</sup> and the "Employment" Directive<sup>3</sup>. These directives still need implementation through EU states in national legislation. The deadline for implementing the Race Directive is July 2003. Vera Egenberger challenged the churches to encourage their national governments to fulfil their obligations on these Directives. In doing this, churches can play an important political role in their countries. Furthermore, churches can cooperate with governments and other groups in implementing National Action Plans as follow-up to recommendations of the UN-World Conference Against Racism (Durban 2001).

## **GENERAL PROPOSALS**

Member churches should ensure that information received from European ecumenical organisations is further disseminated for action to all partners at national level.

Churches and ecumenical bodies should consider new ways of communication from the grass roots to the decision makers and vice versa. Churches should not work in isolation but in co-operation with other civil society groups.

The churches must engage in the building up of local communities, and be led by the commitment to peace.

Churches should connect their projects and actions to the larger ecumenical efforts (e.g. The WCC Decade to Overcome Violence and the follow-up process to the World Conference Against Racism (Durban, 2001) and the National Action Plans of their respective countries)

Churches should celebrate the presence of migrants and treat them and refugees as positive contributors to their communities.

## **PROPOSALS FOR ACTION ON EDUCATION**

### **General remarks:**

Education is an important tool in combating racism. Anti-racism education is an ongoing process rooted in experience, leading into reflection and resulting in action. It is a daily concern that requires a continued commitment to a just and equal society as well as active participation and dialogue, searching and processing personal attitudes and behaviours. Thus it challenges and corrects the negative media interpretations and offers alternatives to indifference, fear and exclusion. Education is not only about learning but also about un-learning. However, on its own, education is not enough to eradicate racism. Education is not a means in itself, but rather one of several instruments to diminish and eradicate racial violence in society.

### **(a) At European level**

The churches should equip the European ecumenical organisations with information, skills and resources in order for them to engage effectively in advocacy and lobby for European positive migration, refugee and asylum policies. They should also provide member churches with necessary information, guidelines and materials to enable them to take necessary actions to influence their respective national policies.

The churches must be committed in reshaping history and accepting other peoples and cultures contributions (see World Governments agreements in the final document of the UN WCAR (Durban 2001).

**(b) At national level  
Churches are called to**

reflect theologically on racism, aiming to clarify the identity and character of the Christian Church (i.e. its inclusiveness, its openness and function as a safe place for everybody). Churches also need to be introspective in order to learn about and to face openly their own distorted historical relations with neighbouring nations and national minorities, in missionary activities around the world and in all areas where damage has been caused by attitudes of superiority.

have a prophetic role. Therefore churches need training and education that help people recognise and understand current events in society, as well as in the global context. The training may include case studies, role play, observation techniques on daily life and to interpret the implications. This will encourage people to speak more openly and more truthfully about their situations and to condemn racial violence and to stand in solidarity with the victims of racism and the needy.

strengthen their own capacities to deal with racial injustice and violence. They have to consider how to use existing structures more effectively (e.g. work among children, youth and adults and effective pastoral care and basic and further anti-racist education for church employees etc.) and to have this embedded in all church life, work and decision making processes.

integrate and exchange the positive experiences and lessons from diversity and partnership programs with churches in other parts of the world and with migrant churches in their midst.

**(c) At local level**

Churches must recognize and work in partnership with their neighbours (be they refugees, migrants or migrant churches) to overcome the hidden mechanisms of exclusion.

Churches must engage in interfaith dialogue and intercultural learning as ways of breaking barriers between people of different faiths and cultural backgrounds.

Theological re-evaluation should be an integral part of churches' activities on education and anti-racism.

Educational efforts should include personal encounters and sharing and exchanging life stories of suffering as a way of understanding human/personal realities.

## **PROPOSALS FOR ACTION ON MEDIA**

### **General remark:**

Church media presentations must reflect the diversity of the society. Full participation of minority ethnic groups in the church media production would help reflect this diversity. Church media could offer training to minority ethnic people as a means to empowerment.

### **At European level**

CCME and CEC should invite APRODEV to co-organise a European Round-Table for aid agencies and mission societies to reflect on their portrayal of black and migrant people in general as well as of other minorities.

CCME and CEC are requested to re-examine the role of European churches in the rise and spread of racism throughout history and to collect and disseminate materials about their findings.

The yearly CEC Prize for Journalism should include criteria of using inclusive anti-racist language.

### **At national level**

Churches are encouraged to use mainstream media to highlight its work. raise awareness in Church and society about their role in slavery, colonialism, discrimination and construction of racial mind patterns.

organise and join anti-racist campaigns i.e. around March 21 (International Day Against Racism).

consider giving prizes for best practices for programmes in the media against racism.

offer training to media experts on developing codes of conducts in order to counter media misrepresentation and misinterpretation of facts, events and history.

Church donor agencies and mission societies must portray positive images of minority ethnic people in their publications

Church media should adopt code of conducts and use checklists to eliminate racist language, procedures and practice.

### **At local level**

Churches should use and exchange existing materials and Websites for awareness raising against racism in the media.

### **III. PROPOSALS FOR ACTION ON MIGRATION.**

#### **General remarks:**

There is need to acknowledge that present European identities are a direct result of centuries of migration. Migration is a natural and integral part of human life. It can, however, become a negative experience if events provoking it force people to leave their homes. Migration into Europe is perceived negatively by the receiving populations and thus racism may easily result from it.

Migration policies in Europe are diverse. This presents challenges for the Churches who may do well to develop clear and common positions on migration policies.

#### **At European level**

Churches should promote positive images of multi-cultural societies  
Churches should reconsider the need of ecumenical institutions to promote correct migration and anti racism policy at European level

#### **At national level**

Churches need to give space for the participation of Christian migrants in the life, work and decision making bodies of the Churches and in employment.  
Churches should allow migrants of other confessions to work in the church institutions.

Migration issues should be included in religious education.

Resources for migrant issues and work should be included in the church budgets.

Churches should make clear statements and position papers on migration and act upon them.

New campaigning models for positive migration policies and practices should be elaborated for common understanding and action.

Churches should inform their constituencies and the general public about the way migration is used by country governments to develop their economies without taking into account the basic human rights of these people contributing to development.

#### **At local level**

Churches should consider the pastoral needs of migrants (Christian or other wise). use the experiences of migrants who received help to help others to formulate strategies for assistance for new migrants.

avoid paternalistic language and ways of operating when dealing with migrants and should provide quality services to migrants and refugees. Churches are encouraged to:

- Raise awareness of migrant issues and concerns.
- engage in contacts with migrant congregations
- Include migrant congregations in their activities.
- Create face to face communication between host and migrant congregations.
- Train voluntary workers to issues migration and racism.
- Introduce hymns, prayers from other cultural backgrounds and include migrants' issues in their liturgy and services etc.

## **PROPOSALS FOR ACTION ON LEGAL AND JUDICIAL MATTERS**

### **General remark:**

All lobby work should be undertaken with professional advice and competence and consistently.

### **At European level**

Ecumenical fora should develop stronger coalitions with other organisations to strengthen their lobbying impact.

Information on important issues and developments should be collated and disseminated to member churches in an easily understood form using such as regular newsletters.

CCME's website should be regularly updated with material and relevant links for supportive work.

### **At national level**

The UN Committee on Elimination of all forms of Racial Discrimination (CERD) receives periodic reports from governments. The Council of Europe's Committee against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI), also establishes periodic reports on the national situations. Both need shadow information by NGO's and Churches should contribute to the elaboration of these NGO reports.

National governments should be invited to sign and ratify relevant international conventions and other legal documents (i.e. the additional protocol no. 12 to the European Convention on Human Rights)

Capacity building and training in the field of anti-racist legislation should be provided through the auspices of a national office

National ecumenical coalitions should be developed to work against racism in all its manifestations

National bodies should regularly report to the responsible authorities regarding concerns and warning signals of impending racial violence.



Churches need to study their national legislations, to be capable of lobbying for necessary changes demanded by the European Union directives on racism and discrimination.

New legislations would also challenge the churches to look at their own structures, their systems of membership and employment.

Churches should lobby governments for legal measures against racism on the Internet.

Working groups should be set up for each of the EU Racism and Employment directives to deal with affirmative action and religious discrimination respectively.

Churches should support and participate in national bodies set up in accordance with the Race Directive, i.e. national Round tables

#### **At local level**

Churches should consider offering training to victims and potential targets of racial violence on the use of legal measures (capacity building). reporting and encouraging the reporting of incidences of racial violence to the authorities and offer support to victims. Churches could offer free accompaniment to the Court or assistance in other judicial matters to victims of racial violence.

maintaining close contacts with local authorities, schools, migrant faith communities, NGOs and the business community in order to support the growth of cohesive actions.

Church members and leaders should seek information on existing legislation, practice and methods of redress for victims of racial violence.

Materials containing relevant information and advice should be put together centrally in cooperation with authorities, local churches or NGO's.

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<sup>1</sup> Churches' Commission for Migrants in Europe

<sup>2</sup> Council Directive 2000/43/EC implementing the principle of equal treatment between persons irrespective of racial or ethnic origin

<sup>3</sup> Employment Directive Council Directive 2000/78/EC establishing a general framework for equal treatment in employment and occupation