

Accra +20 Consultation: Celebrating, Confessing, Covenanting

3-5 December 2024, Hannover, Germany

Final Statement

Meeting 20 Years since the drafting of the Accra Confession, we acknowledge that this is also the second year of Christ being under the rubble at Christmas in Gaza. Gathered here, we experience a world “in deadly convulsions”, much more scandalous than twenty years ago. We are experiencing a climate catastrophe with the very survival of the earth and all life at stake. The continuing oppression of empire seen in the legacies of colonialism and its ongoing manifestation in new forms of coloniality is reflected in the destruction, devastation, and genocide in Gaza and Palestine and the continuing suffering of peoples across the world. The near silence of many of our churches is a cause of lament and leads us to reassess our relatedness to the content of the Accra Confession today for our current times.

The Accra Confession, like all confessions, was born in a process of contestation, where not all elements on the table were agreed upon, and which still presses on us today. Through many wide-ranging presentations, we wrestled with how the Accra Confession speaks to us today or how, through its omissions, it does not. We reflected on how our world continues to change, presenting new life-crushing challenges and manifestations of empire. Amid all this, we identified insights to celebrate and confess and recognized our need to renew our covenant for justice in these times.

Celebrating

We celebrate the Accra Confession as a gift of justice-making and earth-liberating love to the world and as the fruit of the Holy Spirit at work in the church.

Twenty years ago, the Accra Confession offered churches a powerful and empowering framework of radical theology, mission, and praxis through:

- The naming and analysis of Empire
- The rejection of global economic capitalism as a sinful and death-dealing system
- The acknowledgement of the churches’ complicity in this system
- The clarion call to stand with all victims of injustice
- The challenge to listen carefully to the cries from below and of the land and to learn deeply from the wisdom and practices of those residing on the margins in envisioning and fleshing out alternatives.

Since then, the Accra Confession has inspired the witness and actions of Christian communities across the world.

In particular, the ecumenical New International Financial and Economic Architecture (NIFEA) initiative of the World Communion of Reformed Churches (WCRC), World Council of Churches, Lutheran World Federation, World Methodist Council and Council for World Mission enacts the visions and calls in the Accra Confession through advocacy for an alternative financial and economic order that sets clear limits to greed and responds to the climate emergency. NIFEA offers strategic and practical actions and proposals such as the Ecumenical School on Governance, Economics and Management for an Economy of Life (GEM School) and the Zacchaeus Tax campaign for global tax justice.

The analysis emerging from the ongoing ecumenical discussion of the Accra Confession led the WCRC to adopt the term “Global Apartheid” to express its understanding that apartheid as a system of domination and exclusion is one of the unnamed realities we live with. Disparities as a result of socio-economic inequalities are one of the most glaring forms of global apartheid, and the disproportionate suffering of the poor, the marginalised, and people of colour across the world evidence how powerfully relevant the term has become.

Covenanting together implies working at all levels within the context of our churches. Too often, we have heard that neither the Accra Confession nor its principles have seeped into the life and witness of our congregations. While we acknowledge that there is work to be done, we also recognize that there are already living examples of engaged communities and congregations. We have heard from various parts of the globe how congregations are working to resist imperialism and colonialism at a grassroots level. Whether by working towards ecological sustainability, poverty alleviation or resisting authoritarian regimes. Others have worked towards education and theological education. One example is the TEEL (Theological Education for Economy of Life) programme of the Council for World Mission (CWM), which has sought to offer postgraduate degree programmes that have taken the ideas of the Accra Confession forward.

Today, the Accra Confession remains prophetic, prescient, and material. It speaks to the existential challenges of our generation. It continues to remind us of God’s covenant to uphold the integrity of the Earth over technological empire in a time of climate breakdown and the 4th industrial revolution. It continues to call us to reject any attempt in the life of the church to separate justice and unity. It continues to offer a platform for churches to encounter and walk with labour, farmers and other movements. It invites us to embody metanoia by countering injustice in all its forms and co-creating alternatives.

Confessing

Re-committing—Constants from Accra

In Accra, we read the signs of the times and prophetically denounced the heartless neoliberal capitalist system that has its roots in imperialism and colonialism. Since then, we have seen only an intensification of this death-dealing economic system and the ideologies that uphold it. It is a racialized, patriarchal, and militarized economic system maintained, protected, and defended by empire for the benefit of the few. In this world, politics have been commodified and turned into “the bread and circus” of the masses, but in fact, serve the security of the dominant classes. We have seen the rise of “post-truth”, where media and emerging technologies are being co-opted and used not to share information to bring humanity together but to separate and demonize “others” and continue to lie and declare that there is only one way. The rise of authoritarian regimes driven by toxic masculinity, the cult of personalities and celebrities is increasingly shrinking the space for people’s full participation in self-determination and the shaping of a just and participatory society.

The Accra Confession correctly perceives the realities of empire, and today, more than ever, empire is an extension of colonialism. This is manifested particularly as settler-colonialism, which is upheld with the complicity of religions that legitimize and give it a divine character. Rejecting colonialism in all its forms is a way to redeem ourselves from idolatry.

In 1982, the World Alliance of Reformed Churches recognised and acknowledged that apartheid was not just a political misdirection. It was idolatry, a distortion of the Gospel and therefore a sin and a heresy. We knew what suffering, pain and death that supremacist ideology, in the guise of the Gospel and the name of Jesus of Nazareth, had inflicted on God’s children. Therefore, in the

wake of Gaza, it should not be hard to recognise what that same perversion of the Gospel, in the guise of Christian Zionism, is at this moment inflicting upon our siblings in Palestine and Lebanon and on the integrity of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. We should be as insistent that this present false gospel of Christian Zionism be declared a sin, idolatry, and heresy as are all forms of religious nationalism. Therefore, we call upon all churches in our communion to mobilize with us to work for the self-determination of and the right of return of Palestinian people to the land. We will continue to work for justice, believing that working with God for God's vision of a righteous world will bring unity. We will not turn away from justice for the ease of unity. We are called to be prophetic witnesses.

We reaffirm that God is a God of justice and that the Accra Confession emphasizes economic, social and ecological justice. This implies reparatory and restorative justice in response to climate change, the trading of peoples as commodities and indigenous people.

Twenty years later, we have failed to engage in the emergency of climate catastrophe and species extinction. Siblings living in the Pacific are losing their homes from rising sea levels, and siblings in Africa suffer from drought. Yet, powerful countries continue to shrink away from real change. Therefore, we call on our churches to engage their governments to push the international fight for climate justice—where the onus cannot be solely on the Global South who most feel the effects, but for our full communion to model care and concern for the forgotten people who are sacrificed with our earth for the benefit of the few under empire. We affirm that the earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof (Psalms 24:1-2)

Colonialism and the slave trade, Neo-colonialism, and settler colonialism significantly undermine the right of peoples to freedom, the land and self-determination. We specifically recognize the impact of the transatlantic slave trade on African-descended peoples across the world, as well as the effects of the Indian Ocean slave trade. We further acknowledge and call for repentance, reparatory and restorative justice for Indigenous peoples who are being removed from their land for the economic gain of a few. Indigenous peoples are losing their lands, or more accurately, having their lands taken from them. As one Indigenous person explained at our consultation, for Indigenous peoples—nothing has changed since Accra.

We affirm that reparations are a Biblical imperative that emerges from the concept of Jubilee (Leviticus 25: 8-55). We call for further exploration of Jubilee's principles, which are grounded in reparation and rest and directed toward the flourishing of land and people.

At this consultation we affirmed Accra in its strong witness in lifting the voices of suffering people, yet stronger affirmation is needed. We lament that LGBTQIA+ peoples around the world and in our churches continue to struggle for full recognition or any recognition at all. We mourn how some groups, like Trans, are singled out for the divisive political ends of culture wars that are being played out in some countries. We confess that Accra did not name the injustices facing LGBTQIA+ persons, and did not foresee how the fight for queer justice would be co-opted by empire to be used as a pawn in a nationalistic battle for power—making our vulnerable LGBTQIA+ siblings even more marginalized.

The Accra Confession stated that women and children were the worst affected by Mammon. Still, it did not notice how fundamental hetero-normative patriarchy is in upholding this system of neo-capitalism. The unseen labor of women and the continuing system of modern-day slavery and enforced labour upholds our patriarchal capitalist regime. Capitalism systematically devalues and renders invisible both the reproductive and care labour traditionally assigned to women. Our world does not allow for equal participation of all. We are valued by our economic output in an ableist

system rather than being valued as being made in the image of God and cherished and loved by God. Those living with disabilities face systematic exclusion and devaluation in a society that privileges certain forms of ability over human dignity. We acknowledge that new visions of the world need to be informed and led by those whose contributions are systematically devalued and hidden - whether through unpaid labor, disability, age, or social status. As Joel prophesied that God's Spirit would be poured out on all flesh (Joel 2:28-32, Acts 2:17), we are called to recognize God's presence in those societies that have devalued and rendered invisible and to ensure their full inclusion and participation in shaping our common future.

One of the biggest crises of our times is that more and more people around the world are being forced away from their lands and homes. Whether this be from the terroristic actions of governments or exploitative non-state actors, land grabs by extractive industries, natural disasters supercharged by human-induced climate change, or the scarcity of resources created by unjust market practices. This is creating a surge in migration that needs to be responded to with compassion, not the erection of walls and other obstacles to the free movement of people. Alongside this, there is the scourge of human trafficking, commodifying people, especially women and children, and exploiting them for profit and commercial gain.

Coloniality, as the ongoing expression of colonialism, instead of repenting for the past exploitation of resources and the oppression of people, is upholding white supremacy and continuing the colonial empire. It does this by moving Indigenous peoples from their land to mine for the presumed technological revolution, displacing Palestinians and, supplanting and financing Europeans or people from the US to live in the Occupied Palestinian Territories and upholding the apartheid system. Coloniality is also commodifying movements for justice. The work of decoloniality is being co-opted by capitalism to keep economic, natural, and epistemological resources in the West instead of sharing and valuing wealth and wisdom from the Majority World.

Nationalism, as it is presented today, is a different face to twenty years ago. We see global powers using scare tactics to enhance their personal power and sacrifice the lives and integrities of even their nations. The monied classes have hijacked politics. The choice of the lesser evil is no choice at all. We will not be bound by the choices pushed before us by the monied classes. We turn to God and away from the multiple idolatries that plague our world. We turn to God to transform and renew our minds, offering our bodies to be pleasing to God, joining in God's perfect will for life to flourish for all. (Romans 12:1-2).

Covenanting

To understand what covenanting means to us today, we must problematize the idea of covenant and how it is used in the Accra Confession. Understood as God-given, it expresses 'chosenness', which has been used in other places and contexts as an entitlement to supremacy, Christian nationalism, and racism, but covenanting together as a form of resistance is not this. Quite the opposite, it is a call for costly solidarity. Covenanting together as an act of solidarity with the suffering of all creation, of which are fully a part as one of many species of many different kinds, is not simply churches talking together or taking a stand with each other; it requires identifying with other movements and struggles and being fully present with and alongside them as committed partners sharing what we have and receiving what we need, including their critique when we are found lacking.

In these terms, the upcoming WCRC General Council theme, 'Persevere in Your Witness,' does not mean continuing with business as usual. Instead, it is a call to recommit to the core message

of the Accra Confession: that *the integrity of our faith is at stake* if we do not respond to the cries of suffering all around us.

As we heard in our gathering, the call to covenant together for justice in the economy and the earth is still prophetic and ever more necessary. Still, in our changing world, we face challenges that the Accra Confession, in its reading of the signs of the times, did not embrace. All manifestations of suffering in the context of empire and its systems of injustice, we now call on the members of the WCRC to engage them too in their witness and actions, covenanting together to address:

Systemic Oppression and Land Rights

While the Accra Confession powerfully addressed economic injustice and visited the slave dungeons of Elmina, it did not fully articulate the ongoing impacts of settler colonialism and forced displacement. Despite acknowledging "resource-driven wars" (paragraph 7) and "communities are disrupted, livelihoods are lost" (paragraph 8), the Accra Confession did not specifically address Indigenous land rights, the global refugee crisis, or the theological underpinnings of Palestinian dispossession.

Therefore, we recognize and reject the continuing systems of settler colonialism, forced displacement, and religious nationalism that dispossess Indigenous peoples, create refugees, and deny Palestinians their fundamental rights. We affirm that land rights, self-determination, and the right to return are essential to human dignity and God's vision of justice.

Identity-Based Justice and Inclusion

Though the Accra Confession acknowledged that "the majority of those in poverty are women and children" (paragraph 7) and rejected "any form of injustice which destroys right relations – gender, race, class, disability, or caste" (paragraph 27), it did not explicitly address gender justice, heteronormative patriarchal structures, LGBTQIA+ discrimination, or the rise of nationalist movements that particularly target marginalized communities.

Therefore, we acknowledge that systems of oppression intersect through patriarchy, heteronormativity, and nationalism to exclude and harm marginalized communities. We commit to dismantling these systems within both church and society, affirming the full dignity, leadership, and participation of women, LGBTQIA+ persons, and all who face discrimination based on their identity.

Critical Reflection on AI and the Technology-driven Capitalocene

Today, we need to apply the Accra Confession's definition of empire to the expanding role of technology. In the Capitalocene, cutting-edge technologies, artificial intelligence, and Big Data are emerging as the foremost tools of wealth accumulation and imperial control. In a few years, we may have the world's first trillionaire, whose scandalous affluence is founded on technological domination.

What are the impacts of digitalisation and the growth of the so-called 'gig economy' that turns employees into contractors, removing their employment rights from ordinary working folk? What are the ecological consequences of the Data Cloud, geoengineering as a purported solution to a warming climate, or the race to produce faster and more powerful mobile phones requiring rare-earth minerals? What does the patenting of new vaccines and medicines mean for the health

of vulnerable communities? In which ways can emerging technologies encourage democratisation and strengthen networks of solidarity?

We commit ourselves to carefully studying the confluence of technology and capital. We must ask ourselves: what does the Accra Confession call us to do in these times of rapid and disruptive technological flux?

Resistance to Co-optation and Commodification

The Accra Confession named "unrestrained competition, consumerism and the unlimited economic growth" (paragraph 9) as destructive forces but did not anticipate how justice movements and civil society would be commodified and co-opted by market forces. While it identified "the culture of rampant consumerism" (paragraph 21), it did not address how capitalism would adapt to neutralize resistance through commodification.

Therefore, we reject the co-optation and commodification of justice movements by capitalist interests and commit to centering the voices and leadership of marginalized communities in our work for transformation. We affirm that true justice cannot be achieved through market-based solutions but requires fundamental systemic change.

Recommitting ourselves to the prophetic work of covenanting together with the suffering of creation in all its many forms and peoples, we pray:

Mysterious divine presence,

Coming alongside us in the form of the stranger,

companion traveler to all who are weary, dejected and suffering,

break into our lives with your transforming hope,

bringing fresh understanding and new conviction,

so, like the Emmaus travelers we are empowered to be witnesses

to the resurrection promise that life is stronger than death

even when life-denying narratives and forces threaten to overwhelm us,

for the integrity of our faith is at stake

if we cannot be so bold as to live and proclaim your promise of justice and abundant life for all.

Amen.

This statement represents the reflections of 48 activists, theologians, and church leaders from across the world who were gathered together at the invitation of the World Communion of Reformed Churches (WCRC) to revisit the Accra

Confession 20 years on from its adoption by the World Alliance of Reformed Churches (WARC, the predecessor body of the WCRC) at its General Council in Accra in 2004.